Talbot Baines Reed

"The Adventures of a Three-Guinea Watch"

Chapter One.

My infancy and education—How I was sold and who bought me.

"Then you can guarantee it to be a good one to go?"

"You couldn't have a better, sir."

"And it will stand a little roughish wear, you think?"

"I'm sure of it, sir; it's an uncommon strong watch."

"Then I'll take it."

These few sentences determined my destiny, and from that moment my career may be said to have begun.

I am old, and run down, and good for nothing now; but many a time do I find my thoughts wandering back to this far-off day; and remembering all that has befallen me since that eventful moment, I humbly hope my life has not been one to disgrace the good character with which I went out into the world.

I was young at the time, very young—scarcely a month old. Watches however, as every one knows, are a good deal more precocious in their infancy than human beings. They generally settle down to business as soon as they are born, without having to spend much of their time either in the nursery or the schoolroom.

Indeed, after my face and hands had once been well cleaned, and a brand-new shiny coat had been put on my back, it was years before I found myself again called upon to submit to that operation which is such a terror to all mortal children.

As to my education, it lasted just a week; and although I am bound to say, while it lasted, it was both carefully and skilfully

managed, I did not at all fancy the discipline I was subjected to in the process. I used to be handed over to a creature who took me up and examined me (as if he were a policeman and a magistrate combined), and according as I answered his questions he exclaimed, "You're going too fast," or "You're going too slow," and with that he set himself to "regulate" me, as he called it. I was ordered to turn round, take off my coat, and submit my poor shoulders to his instrument of correction. But why need I describe this experience to boys? They know what "regulating" means as well as I do!

Well in due time I profited by the instructions received, and one day my tutor, after the usual examination, grumpily told me, "You're right at last; you can go." And I did go, and I've been going ever since.

The troubles of my infancy however were not all over. I discovered at a very early age that the one thing a watch is never allowed to do is to go to sleep. They'd as soon think of leaving an infant to starve as of letting a watch go to sleep.

But to my story. Ever since I had left school—or, in other words, gone through my due course of regulation—I had remained shut up under a glass-case, lying comfortably upon a bed of purple velvet, and decorated with a little white label bearing the mysterious inscription, "Only Three Guineas." From this stately repose I was only once a day disturbed in order to be kept from sleeping, and had all the rest of my time to look about me and observe what went on in the world in which I found myself.

It was not a big world indeed, but I could see I was not the only inhabitant. All around me were watches like myself, some of a golden complexion, and some—of which I was one—of a silvery. Some were big, and made an awful noise, and some were tiny, and just whispered what they had to say. Some were very proud, and showed off their jewels and chains in a way which made me blush for the vanity of my fellow-creatures—"dear" watches, the ladies called these, and others were as plain as plain could be.

Every now and then our case would be opened, and one of my neighbours taken out and never put back. Then we knew he had been sold, and we who were left spent our time in gossiping about what had become of him, and speculating whose turn would come next. A gold repeater near me was very confident the turn would be his, and so impressed us with the sense of his "striking" importance and claims, that when the next time our glass house was entered, and a hand came groping in our

direction, I at once concluded it was his summons into publicity and honour. Imagine my astonishment, then, when the hand, instead of reaching my gold neighbour, took hold of me and cautiously drew me out of the case! My heart leaped to my mouth—or whatever part of a watch's anatomy corresponds with that organ—and I was ready to faint with excitement. I had always imagined I was to lie in that case for years, but now, when I was barely a month old, here was I going out into the world.

It made me quite bashful to listen to all the flattering things my master said of me. I was worth twice the price he was selling me at, he said; in fact, if trade had been good he would not have parted with me under three times that price. It was a relief to think the repeater could not overhear this, or he would have sneered in a way to extinguish me altogether. As it was, no other watch was by, so that I was not very much embarrassed.

After turning me over, and feeling my pulse, and listening to the beating of my heart, and taking off my coat and waistcoat to inspect my muscle, my master's customer at last laid me down on the counter and pronounced the sentences with which I have begun my story.

"Then I'll take it," he said, and pulled out his purse. "Stop a bit, though!" exclaimed he; "I'd better have a chain too, my little chap will think more of that than the watch. Let me see some silver chains, will you?"

So my master went and fetched a tray containing a large number of tempting-looking chains.

While he was gone my new owner took me up again in his hand and turned me over and put me to his ear; then as he laid me down again he smiled to himself and murmured.

"Bless his little heart! how proud he'll be!"

I was quite taken aback. Who was this taking upon himself to bless my little heart and prophesy that I should be proud? Then all of a sudden it occurred to me this remark may have been intended to refer not to me, but to the "little chap" the gentleman had just now spoken of. So I recovered my composure, especially when I saw what a kind, gentle face my purchaser had.

He chose a neat, strong silver chain which was forthwith, in accordance with the barbarous practice of the age, fixed to my

poor neck. I could not help sighing as I felt for the first time the burden of bondage.

What had I done to be thus chained like a Roman captive, like a dog, like a parrot? But it was no use being in a rage. I swallowed my indignation as well as I could, and consoled myself with the reflection that every watch, even gold repeaters themselves, are subject to the same hardship.

Ah! I was young then, and my knowledge of the world was small. Many a time since I have blessed the chain that held me, just as the ship, could it speak, would bless the cable that saved it from the rocks. Take the advice of an old ticker, you young watches, and instead of rebelling against your chains, rather hope they may be strong and sound in every link!

"That will be just five pounds, won't it?" said my purchaser. "Here is a bank note. Never mind about doing it up, I'll just slip it into my pocket. Good-morning."

And with that I was conscious of being lowered into a dark, deep pit, and without time to bid my comrades good-bye, or to take a last look at my old master, I felt myself hurried away I knew not whither.

This, then, was my first step into the world.

I lay untouched and apparently forgotten for several hours. Gradually getting my eyes accustomed to the darkness, and looking about me as far as I was able, I heard a ticking going on in a pocket not very far from the one I was in, which I at once concluded to proceed from the watch of my new master. Thinking I might be able to gain some information from him, I groped about till I found a small hole in my lodgings through which I was able to peep, and call.

"Tick!" said I, as loud as I could, to secure the attention of my fellow-watch.

"Who's that?" at once exclaimed the other.

"I'm a new watch, bought to-day."

"Humph! How much?"

"Three guineas."

"Chain and all?"

"No; five pounds with the chain."

"Humph, I cost thirty guineas. Never mind, you're for the boy."

"What boy?"

"The governor's. I heard him say he was going to get him one. That boy will be spoiled, as sure as I go on springs; he's made such a lot of. Have you been regulated?"

"I should think I have!" exclaimed I, in indignant recollection of my education.

"All right; keep your temper. What time are you?"

"Seven minutes to six."

"Wrong! It's seven and three-quarters!"

"How do you know?"

"Because that's what I make it."

"How do you know you are right?" I asked, wondering at my own impudence in thus questioning an old ticker.

"Look here, young fellow," said the other in an awful voice; "you don't seem to know you are addressing a gold watch that has neither gained nor lost a minute for five years! There! You may think yourself clever; but you're too fast."

"I'm sure I beg your—"

"That'll do!" said the offended veteran. "I want no more words."

I was completely shut up at this, and retired back to my pocket very crestfallen.

Presently I began to feel drowsy; my nerves seemed to get unstrung, and my circulation flagged. It was long after the time I had generally been in the habit of being wound up; and I began to be afraid I was really going to be left to go to sleep. That, by this time, I knew would be nothing short of a calamity. I therefore gave a slight tug at my chain.

"What's the matter?" it said, looking down.

"I've not been wound up."

"I can't help that," said the chain.

"Can't you let him know somehow?" I gasped, faintly.

"How can I? He's busy packing up books."

"Couldn't you catch yourself in his fingers or something? I'm in a bad way."

"I'll see," said the chain.

Presently I felt an awful tug at my neck, and I knew the chain had managed to entangle itself somehow with his fingers.

"Hullo!" I heard my master exclaim, "I mustn't smash Charlie's chain before I give it to him. I'd better put it and the watch away in my drawer till the morning. Heigho! it'll be a sad day for me to-morrow!"

As he spoke he drew me from the pocket, and, disengaging the chain from his button-hole, he laid us both in a drawer and shut it up. I was in despair, and already was nearly swooning from weakness.

He had shut the drawer, and his hand was still on the knob, when all of a sudden he exclaimed,—

"By the way, I must wind it up, or it'll stop!"

With what joy and relief I saw the drawer again opened, and felt myself taken out and wound up! Instantly new life seemed to infuse itself through my frame; my circulation revived, my nerves were strung again, and my drooping heart resumed its usual healthy throb. Little did my master think of the difference this winding up made to my health and comfort.

"Now you're happy!" said the chain, as we found ourselves once more in the drawer.

"Yes; I'm all right now, I'm glad to say," said I. "What's going to happen to us to-morrow?" I asked presently.

"We're going to be given to the boy, and he's going to school;" so the silver chain told me. "Nice time we shall have of it, I expect."

After that he went to sleep, and I fell to counting the seconds, and wondering what sort of life I was destined to lead.

About an hour after I heard two voices talking in the room.

"Well," said one, and I recognised it at once as my master's, "the packing's all finished at last."

"Ah, Charles," said the other, and it seemed to be a woman's voice speaking amid tears, "I never thought it would be so hard to part with him."

"Tut, tut!" said the first, "you mustn't give way, Mary. You women are so ready to break down. He'll soon be back;" but before my master had got to the end of his sentence he too had broken down.

For a long time they talked about their boy, their fine boy who had never before left his parents' roof, and was about now to step out into the treacherous world. How they trembled for him, yet how proudly and confidently they spoke of his prospects; how lovingly they recalled all their life together, from the days when he could first toddle about, down to the present.

Many tears were mingled with their talk, and many a smothered sob bespoke a desperate effort to subdue their common sorrow. At last they became quieter, then I heard my master say,—

"I positively have never shown you the watch I got for him," and with that he opened the drawer and produced me.

"Oh, Charles," cried the mother, "how delighted he will be, and what a capital watch it is!"

And she looked at me affectionately for a long time, for her son's sake, smiling through her tears, and then put me back.

Need I say that as these two knelt together that night, their only son was not forgotten in their prayers?

So ended the first day of my adventures.

Chapter Two.

How I was presented to a boy, and of a certain journey we took together.

Very early next morning, when my hands scarcely pointed to five o'clock, the little household was astir. There was a noise of hurried going and coming, and of trunks being carried down stairs, and for the first time I heard mingled with the sedate voices of my master and his wife, another voice, cheery and musical, which I at once guessed to belong to my future lord and master.

It was not till after this bustle had been going on for a good while that I was taken out of the drawer and put back into the pocket in which I had spent so many anxious hours the day before. But here I was destined not to remain long, as will be seen.

Breakfast was a sad meal to that little family. Even the gay, high-spirited boy was sobered in anticipation of the coming parting, and as to his parents, they dared not open their lips for fear of breaking down.

Then there was a rumbling of wheels in the street, and a banging about of boxes at the hall door; then a last long embrace between mother and son. She no longer resisted her grief, and he for the time forgot everything but her he was leaving; then father and son stepped into the cab and drove away.

I felt the father's heart beating quicker and his chest heaving deeper as we proceeded. Presently his hand stole to the pocket where I lay hid, and he said—

"Charlie, boy, I've said all I have to say to you. You will remember our talk last night, I am sure, and I shall remember it too. I have no greater wish than to see my boy brave and honest and true to himself. Remember always I am your father, and never hesitate to tell me whenever you are in trouble, or danger, or—and I hope this won't often be—in disgrace. See here," said he, drawing me forth, "this is a watch which your mother and I have got for you. Think of us when you use it; and mind this, Charlie, make the best use of time, or time will become your enemy."

The poor man faltered out these words with a half-broken heart, as he handed me to his son.

The boy's eyes brightened and his face became radiant at the sight of his unexpected treasure. What boy does not covet a watch of his own at some time or other?

"Oh, father!" he cried, "how good and kind of you! What a beauty!"

The father smiled to see his son's delight, and helped to fasten the chain to his button-hole.

"You and mother are bricks!" exclaimed Charlie, feasting his eyes upon me, and half wild with delight. "How *did* you know I was longing to have one?"

"Were you?" inquired the father.

"Of course I was, and you knew it. What a swell I shall be! And it will always be sure to remind me of home."

While this talk was going on I had leisure to examine my new owner. Picture to yourselves a curly-haired, bright-eyed boy of thirteen with honest, open face, good features, and winning smile. He is big for his age, and strongly built. At present his form is arrayed in a brand-new suit of grey; his collar is new and his tie is new, his boots are new and his socks are new; everything is new about him, down to the very guard of his hat, and he himself is the newest and purest of all. Was ever such a radiant young hero turned loose into the world?

And now, over and above his other glories, he had me to crown all. The graceful curve of my chain on his waistcoat gave that garment quite a distinguished appearance, and the consciousness of a silver watch in his pocket made him hold his head even higher than usual.

"He is a beauty!" again he broke out, "exactly the kind I like most. I'll take ever such a lot of care of him." And so saying, he began to swing me at the end of the chain, till I suddenly came sharply into collision with the door of the cab.

"Hullo," exclaimed my young master, "that won't do. I'll put him away now. It *was* good of you, father."

With that we reached the railway station, and in the bustle that ensued I was for the time forgotten.

Charlie's trunks were duly labelled for Randlebury, and then came the hardest moment of all, when father and son must part.

"I wonder if you'll be altered, Charlie, when I see you again."

"Not for the worse I hope, anyhow," replied the boy, laughing.

"Tickets, please!" demanded the guard.

"There goes the bell," said Charlie, pulling me out of his pocket. "They're very punctual. Hullo, we're off! Good-bye, father."

"Good-bye, boy, and God bless you."

And there was a close grasp of the hand, a last smile, a hasty wave from the window; and then we were off.

How many grown-up men are there who cannot recall at some time or other this crisis in their lives, this first good-bye from the home of their childhood, this stepping forth into the world with all that is familiar and dear at their backs, and all that is strange and unknown and wonderful stretching away like a vast landscape before them? How many are there who would not give much to be back once more at that threshold of their career; and to have the chance of living over again the life they began there with such bright hopes and such careless confidence? Ah, if some of them could have seen whither that flower-strewn path was to lead them, would they not rather have chosen even to die on the threshold, than take so much as the first step forth from the innocent home of childhood!

But I am wandering from my story. For half an hour after that last good-bye Charlie leaned back in the corner of his carriage and gave himself up to his loneliness, and I could feel his chest heaving to keep down the tears that would every now and then rise unbidden to his eyes.

But what boy of thirteen can be in the dumps for long? Especially if he has a new watch in his pocket. Charlie was himself again before we had well got clear of London, and his reviving spirits gradually recalled to his memory his father's parting gift, which had for a while been half forgotten amid other cares.

Now again I was produced, I was turned over and over, was listened to, was peeped into, was flourished about, was taken off my chain, and put on again with the supremest satisfaction. At every station we came to, out I came from his pocket, to be compared with the railway time. By the clock at Batfield I was a minute slow—a discrepancy which was no sooner discovered than I felt my glass face opened, and a fat finger and thumb putting forward my hand to the required time. At Norbely I was two minutes fast by the clock, and then (oh, horrors!) I found

myself put back in the same rough-and-ready way. At Maltby I was full half a minute behind the great clock, and on I went again. At the next station the clock and I both gave the same time to a second, and then what must he do but begin to regulate me! After a minute calculation he made the astounding discovery that I had lost a minute and a quarter in four hours, and that in order to compensate for this shortcoming it would be necessary for him to move my regulator forward the two hundred and fortieth part of an inch. This feat he set himself to accomplish with the point of his scarf-pin while the train was jolting forward at the rate of thirty miles an hour!

I began to grow nervous. If this was a sample of what I was to expect, I had indeed need be the healthy, hardy watch I was represented to be by my maker.

And yet I could not be angry with my brave, honest little tormentor.

It was a sight to see him during that long journey, in all the glory of a new suit, with a high hat on his head for the first time, and a watch in his pocket. *In* his pocket, did I say? I was hardly ever so lucky. Every five minutes he whipped me out to see how the time was going. If he polished me up once with his handkerchief, he did it twenty times, and each time with such vigour that I was nearly red-hot under the operation. And no sooner was he tired of polishing me, than he took to paying his hat the same attention, till that wretched article of decoration must have trembled for its nap. Then he would take to whistling and singing (what boy can help doing one or the other in a train?) and as I heard all his little artless songs and gay chirping, I thought it the pleasantest music one could possibly listen to. And, not to let his hands be less busy than his throat, he would bring out the wonderful six-bladed knife his uncle had given him, and exploring all its wonders, and opening all its blades at the same time, together with the corkscrew, the gimlet, the pincers, and the button-hook, at different angles, would terrify the lives out of his fellow-passengers by twirling the awful bristling weapon in his fingers within a foot or so of their faces.

“Mind, dear,” said an old lady on the seat opposite, “you’ll cut your fingers off, I’m certain.”

“Oh, no, I won’t,” exclaimed he, taking out his handkerchief, and beginning to polish the blades one after another.

The old lady trembled as she watched him, and sighed with relief when the operation was over.

Presently, having nothing particular to do, he stared at her. "Would you like to know the time, ma'am?" he inquired.

"If you please," replied the good old soul.

"Well, it's just seventeen minutes and nineteen seconds past three by my watch. Would you like to see for yourself, ma'am?"

And, pleased to have a confidant of his possessions, he loosed my chain, and flourished me bodily before the eyes of his new friend.

She took me kindly, and said, "What a fine watch you've got, dear?"

"Yes," replied he, with lofty condescension; "like to see his works?"

"You should be careful, you know," she said, "watches so easily get out of order."

"Oh, I won't hurt it," said he, proceeding to take off my coat and waistcoat. "There! there are his works. Don't breathe hard, or you'll damp them."

So the old lady held her breath and peeped in, much to my young master's gratification.

"And so you're going to school, my man?" said she presently.

"Yes; who told you! Did my father tell you?"

"No, I guessed."

"Did you though? Can you guess what the name of the school is?"

"No, I can't do that."

"Have a try."

"Well, then, I guess Randlebury, because my boy is there, and it's the only one I can think of."

The boy stared at her. "How ever did you know that?"

"What!" she exclaimed, "you don't mean to tell me you *are* going to Randlebury?"

"I am, though."

"Well, I never," cried the good old soul, "who would have believed it! Think of your going to the same school as my Tom."

"Is Tom your boy's name?"

"Yes."

"Is he a nice boy?"

Such a question to ask any one's mother!

The old lady burst into tears instead of answering—a proceeding which greatly alarmed and disconcerted my master.

"Don't cry," he said excitedly. "Look here! I didn't mean—oh, don't! Look here, shall I tell you the time? It's—it's sixteen minutes to four—I didn't mean, you know. Of course he's a nice boy—oh, don't cry!"

And he got into such a state that the old lady dried her eyes at once.

"Never mind me, dear," said she, "it wasn't you made me cry: it was thinking of my Tom. You'll be a good friend to him, won't you, dear?"

"Perhaps he won't like me."

"Now I'm sure he will," exclaimed the lady warmly; so warmly that I quite loved her for my little master's sake. Both were silent for some time, and then Charlie asked,—

"I say, has he got a watch?"

"No."

"Oh, never mind," said he, in a tone of evident relief, "I can tell him the time, you know, whenever he wants to know."

"To be sure you can."

Then Charlie took to polishing me and the chain up again, an occupation which lasted until we arrived at Gunborough Junction, where passengers changed for Randlebury.

"Good-bye, dear," said the old lady, as Charlie proceeded to get together his things.

"Good-bye," said he. "Would you like to know the time before I go? It's eight past five. Good-bye."

"May I give you a kiss?" said she.

Charlie blushed, but offered his cheek hurriedly.

"And you promise to be a good friend to Tom," said she, kissing him, "won't you?"

"All right," said the boy, jumping out on to the platform, and running to see after his luggage.

In a moment however he returned to the window and put his head in.

"I say," said he, "what's his name—Tom what?"

"Drift," said the old lady, "Tom Drift!"

"Oh!" replied my master, "all right, good-bye;" and next minute the train went on, and he was left standing surrounded by his luggage in the middle of the platform, like a lighthouse in the middle of an island.

Chapter Three.

How my master and I reach Randlebury in state, and of a great calamity.

My master and I had nearly an hour to wait on the platform at Gunborough before the Randlebury train came up. Part of this interval Charlie, for fear he might forget to do it at night, devoted to winding me up; an experiment which nearly closed my career for ever, for he first began to turn the key the wrong way; then, when he had discovered his mistake, he started in the other direction with a sudden dash, and finally overwound

me to such an extent that I expected every second to hear my heart break with the strain.

Then he sat on his boxes, whistling to himself and drumming his heels on the platform. The train came up at last, and in he jumped, finding himself and a grave elderly gentleman in joint possession of the carriage.

Charlie was too busy staring out of the window, whistling, and brushing the dust off his new hat, to take much notice of his companion until the train was fairly started; then, observing the gentleman look at his watch, the boy at once recognised a bond of sympathy and pulled out me.

"I wonder if I'm the same as you?" he said eagerly.

"I hope you are not," said the gentleman, "for I'm a quarter of an hour fast."

"Are you though?" said the boy, in astonishment.

"Why don't you put it right? I would."

"It's a bad thing to put a watch back, my boy; besides, I rather like keeping mine a little fast."

"Do you? I say, do you think my watch is a good one?" said Charlie, thrusting me into the hands of his astonished travelling companion.

"I can't say, my boy. I know nothing about watches. It looks a nice one."

"Yes, father gave it me. I say, are you going to Randlebury?"

"Yes."

"Do you know the school? I'm going there."

"Oh, yes; I know the school. And you are going there, are you?" inquired the gentleman, with interest.

"Yes, I'm a new boy, you know."

"And how do you like going to school?"

"Oh, all right; only I don't know what it'll be like. Eat I say, I don't suppose there's many of the boys my age have got watches, do you?"

The gentleman laughed. "I dare say not," he said. Charlie was silent for a time, and then asked,—

"I say, what sort of fellow's the head master; do you know?"

"I've seen him now and then," said the gentleman.

"Is he awfully stuck-up and strict?" asked the boy anxiously.

"I really don't know," said the gentleman, biting his lips; "I hope not."

"So do I. I wish my father was the head master," said Charlie, the tears for a moment starting to his eyes at the bare thought of such happiness.

The gentleman looked at him very kindly, and said,—

"Cheer up, my little man; perhaps it won't be so bad after all."

Charlie smiled again as he said,—

"Oh, yes, I've got to be brave, you know, because I promised father. But I say, if you ever come to the school, ask for me—my name's Charlie Newcome—will you? because I don't know any of the fellows; and besides," added he, brightening at the idea, "we can see if our watches are going the same, you know."

The gentleman promised, and soon after this the train arrived at Randlebury. The boy bid his companion farewell, and went off as before to look after his belongings.

As he was standing surrounded by his baggage, a man in the dress of a coachman came up to him and said,—

"Are you the young party from London for the school?"

"Yes," replied the boy.

"It's all right," said the man; "give us hold of these things, and jump inside my trap."

"How far is it?" he asked of the man.

"Better of three miles."

"Is it, though? I say, can't you put the things inside, and then I can ride on the box?"

"All square," said the man; "hop up, my young bantam."

The young bantam did hop up, and they were soon on their way to the school.

I need hardly say it was not long before Charlie and the driver were on confidential terms. The boy duly produced first me and then his six-bladed knife to the admiring eyes of his new companion, insisting on his taking both into his hands, and demanding his candid opinion on their merits.

Presently a wholly new idea seemed to strike him.

"I say, driver, what's your name?"

"Jim, if you want to know," replied that public servant.

"Well, Jim, I wish you'd just get inside and look after the luggage, and let me drive; will you?"

The man opened his eyes and his mouth at the proposition, and then bursting out laughing.

"Hark at him!" he exclaimed; "did you ever hear the like? Me get inside and let a young shaver like him drive me—ho! ho!"

"Come along, Jim; I know the way; and it *would* be a lark. Come on, *dear* Jim."

And the boy got quite affectionate in his eagerness.

"Dear Jim," who was one of those easy-going men who don't take much persuading when they're approached the right way, at length consented to hand over the reins to Charlie; and after waiting some time to see for himself that the boy could really manage, after a fashion, to drive the horse, he further gratified him by descending from the box, and leaving him in sole possession of the coveted position.

"Get inside, Jim," cried the boy, with beaming face.

Jim, his face all one grin, obeyed, saying, as he did so,—

"Well, if you ain't a queer one! That's the house there, on the top of that hill. Mind how you go, now."

"All right; you get inside. And I say, Jim," added the boy, leaning down from his perch, "make yourself comfortable, you know, and don't bother about me. I want to drive all by myself, and you aren't to help me a bit, mind."

So the driver got inside, and seating himself among the luggage, proceeded to make himself "comfortable," as instructed.

Meanwhile my master, as proud as an emperor, lashed his steed into a canter, and rattled off in the direction of the school.

"That'll astonish some of them caps and gowns, I reckon," I heard cabby say to himself. "You see, if he don't drive us right up to the front door, as comfortable as if we was the sheriff of the county."

You may imagine what was the astonishment of the grave and reverend authorities at Randlebury School when they perceived, coming up the carriage drive, a cab with a boy of thirteen perched on the box, tugging at the reins, hallooing to the horse, and making his whip crack like so many fireworks; while inside, comfortably lounging amid a pile of luggage, reclined cabby at his ease, grinning from ear to ear.

The young Jehu, perfectly innocent of the sensation he was making, pursued his triumphant career at full speed up to the very hall door, pulling up his steed with such a sudden jerk as almost to bring him into a sitting position, while the piled-up luggage inside fell all about the cab with the shock, to the imminent risk of cabby's life.

"Well, if that ain't one way of doing it, I don't know what is!" exclaimed that astonished charioteer, emerging from his precarious quarters. "Down you jump, young un."

Charlie descended, all jubilant with triumph, and pulling out me, exclaimed, "We did that three miles in half an hour—not bad, was it?"

In his excitement he had not observed that the door of the house had opened, and that these words, instead of being addressed to the cabby, had been spoken to a stately female who stood in the portal before him.

Now however he caught sight of her, and not knowing exactly what was the proper thing to do under the circumstances, stared at her.

"What do you say, young man?" inquired she, in a solemn voice.

"Oh," said the boy, "I didn't know it was you. I was telling Jim we had come from the station in half an hour. You know we started at 6.2 by my watch, and it's just 6.33 now. Would you like to see for yourself, marm?" added he, preparing to unfasten the chain.

"I know what the time is, young man," replied she sternly; "and pray, who is Jim?" she asked, looking down in solemn perplexity at this queer boy.

"Oh, he's the driver is Jim, and he got inside, you know, and I've driven nearly all the way up by myself; haven't I, Jim?"

"Come inside, sir," said the matron hurriedly, "and don't stand talking to vulgar cabmen and calling them by their Christian names. Your name is Charles Newcome, I suppose? Come this way."

Charlie followed her in, his enthusiasm rather damped at this somewhat frigid greeting, and sorry in his heart he had not been allowed an opportunity of bidding farewell to his friend the driver.

And now I could hear the little fellow's heart begin to beat quicker as he found himself at length for the first time in his life inside a public school. The rows of caps in the corridors, the distant hum of voices through half-opened doors, the occasional shout from the playground, and the fleeting vision of a master in cap and gown, all had for him the deepest and most mysterious interest. As he sat waiting in the matron's room while that worthy lady went to superintend the bringing in of his luggage, his mind became full of wonderings and misgivings. I who lay so near the seat of his emotions could tell what was going on in his breast. He wondered if the pair of socks lying on the table with a hole in each heel, which appeared to be waiting their turn for mending, belonged to the son of the old lady he had met in the train. He wondered if the footsteps in the passage belonged to the head master, and whether that awful being was being fetched to punish him for his crime of driving the cab. He wondered who the boy was who put his head in at the door and drew it back again. With what reverential eyes he

followed that hero's retreating form, and how he hung on his whistling.

When would *he*, he wondered, be sufficiently hardy to whistle within those awful walls? Then he wondered if he was the only new boy, and if so, whether every one would stare at him and laugh at his new coat. He wished he'd got his old one on, then he wouldn't have felt so brand-new. And then—and then...

But here, tired-out with his long journey and the excitement of the day, a drowsy fit came over him, and without another thought he dropped off to sleep, where he sat. In this attitude the housekeeper found him when she returned.

She could not help feeling rather more than a common interest in this curly-haired, tired-out little fellow, as he sat there in his new clothes, huddled up, with his little hat slipping from his head, and his hand clasping his precious six-bladed knife. Accustomed as she was to boys and their rude ways, this matron had a good deal of softness left in her heart, and I dare say she thought as she watched Charlie that afternoon that if she had ever had a son of her own she would have liked a boy something like the little fellow before her. She went softly up to him, took his hat from its perilous situation, and, lifting him in her strong arms so gently as not to wake him, laid him on her own sofa, and left him there to enjoy his well-merited sleep, while she busied herself about making tea.

It was at this moment that a calamity befell me, which, in my inexperience of the ways and natures of watches, I imagined to be nothing short of fatal. The excitement through which I had passed, and the rough-and-ready usage to which I had been subjected during the day, seemed all of a sudden to overpower me. In some unaccountable way I found my hands caught together in a manner I had never known them to be before; no effort of mine could disengage them, and the exertion thus required, added to the fatigues of the day, produced a sort of paralysis of my whole system without quite losing consciousness. I could feel my circulation become slower and finally stop; my nerves and energies became suspended, and my hands grew numb and powerless. Even my heart ceased to beat, and the little cry of alarm which I gave just before my powers left me failed to bring me any help. I was ill, very ill indeed; to me it seemed as if my last moment had come, and I could not bear the thought of thus early being taken from my young master, whom already I had learned to love as my best, though my roughest friend.

How long I lay thus, speechless and helpless, I cannot say. Once I was just conscious of a slight jerk from my chain as he peeped in and whispered,—

"What are you so quiet about down there?"

Of course I could not answer.

"Do you hear? What are you so quiet about?"

It only added to my misery to know that there was a fellow-being so close at hand, and yet that I was powerless to make him aware of my condition. My silence offended him, for he turned away, muttering to himself,—

"Sulky humbug! I declare some people haven't so much as the manners of a kitchen clock."

After that I was left to myself, in agony and suspense, to wait the moment of my dissolution.

A long time passed before my master stirred, and when he did the housekeeper's tea was cold. She bustled about to make him some more, and was so kind in buttering his toast and hunting for some jam, that the drooping spirits of the tired-out boy revived wonderfully. Indeed, as the meal proceeded he became on friendly and confidential terms even with so awful a personage as Mrs Packer.

"Would you like to see my knife, ma'am?" he asked.

"Bless me, what a knife it is," cried the lady. "You'll go doing yourself some harm with it."

"That's what the other old lady in the train said," replied Charlie, unconscious of wounding the feelings of his hostess, who fondly imagined she was not more than middle-aged; "but then, you know, she thought it was a fine knife, and I think so too, don't you? I say, marm, do you know Tom Drift?"

The change of subject was so sudden that Mrs Packer stared at the boy, half wondering whether he was not talking in his sleep.

"What about him?" she inquired.

"Oh, only the old lady was his mother, and I promised her—at least she said—do you know Tom Drift, ma'am?"

"To be sure; he's one of the boys here."

"Yes—I say, ma'am, might I see Tom Drift, do you think? I've got something to say to him."

Mrs Packer, wholly at a loss to understand her youthful guest, but at the same time disposed to be indulgent to his little whims, said Tom would be at lessons now, and she didn't think he would be able to come.

"Wouldn't it do in the morning?"

"Oh no," said Charlie, with the gravest face. "I must see him to-night, please, if you don't mind."

The housekeeper concluded that Charlie had some important message from the mother to her son, and therefore rang for a servant, whom she despatched with a message to Master Drift that some one wanted to see him.

In a very little time that hero made his appearance; and as he was the first Randlebury boy Charlie had set eyes on, he appeared for a moment a very awful and a very sublime personage in that little new boy's eyes. But Charlie was too intent on his mission to allow himself to be quite overawed.

"Here's a new boy, Master Drift, wants to speak to you."

"What do you want, young un—eh?"

"Oh, it's all right, Tom Drift; only I saw your mother, you know, in the train, and she said you were a nice boy, and she sent her love, and I told her I'd let you know the time whenever you wanted, because you ain't got a watch, you know, and I have. I say, would you like to know the time now, Tom Drift?"

All this was rattled out with such eager volubility, that Tom Drift, hero as he was, was fairly taken aback, and looked quite sheepish, as the beaming boy proceeded to pull me out of his pocket.

"Well, it's just—hullo!"

He saw in an instant something was wrong.

"Why, it says only half-past six—that must be wrong!"

"It's eight o'clock by the hall clock," said Mrs Packer; "it's just now struck."

Charlie looked at me, opened me, held me to his ear, and then exclaimed,—

"Oh! my watch has stopped! My watch has stopped! What shall I do?" and the poor boy, overwhelmed with his misfortune, held me out appealingly, and scarcely restrained the tears which started to his eyes.

Chapter Four.

How I was cured of my ailments, and how my master began life at Randlebury.

All this while Tom Drift had said nothing, but had stood regarding first my master, and then me, with mingled amusement, pity, and astonishment. At last, when poor Charlie fairly thrust me into his hands, that he might see with his own eyes the calamity which had befallen the watch that had been destined to minister such consolation to his time-inquiring mind, he took me gingerly, and stared at me as if I had been a toad or a dead rat.

"Can't you make it go, Tom Drift? Please do."

"How can I make him go? I don't know what's the row."

"Do you think it would be a good thing to wind it up?" asked Charlie.

"Don't know; you might try."

Charlie did wind me up; but that was not what I wanted. Already I had had that done while waiting at Gunborough Junction.

"What do you say to shaking him?" asked Tom Drift presently. Most people spoke of me as "it," but Tom Drift always called me "him."

"I hardly like," said Charlie; "*you* try."

Tom took me and solemnly shook me; it was no use. I still remained speechless and helpless.

"Suppose we shove his wheels on?" next suggested that sage philosopher.

Charlie demurred a little at this; it seemed almost too bold a remedy, even for him; however he yielded to Tom's superior judgment.

The heir of the house of Drift accordingly took a pin from the lining of his jacket, and, taking off my coat and waistcoat, proceeded first to prod one of my wheels and then another, but in vain. They just moved for an instant but then halted again, as stiff end lifeless as ever.

For a moment the profound Tom seemed baffled, and then at last a brilliant idea occurred to him.

"I tell you what, I expect he's got damp, or cold, or something. We'd better warm him!"

And the two boys knelt before the fire with me between them, turning me at the end of my chain so as to get the warmth on all sides, like a leg of mutton on a spit.

Of course that had no effect. What was to be done? No winding up, no shaking, no irritation of my wheels with a pin, no warming of me at the fire, could avail anything. They were ready to give me up. Suddenly, however, Tom, who had been examining my face minutely, burst into a loud laugh.

"What a young donkey you are!" he cried. "Don't you see his hands are caught? That's what's the matter. The minute-hand's got bent, and can't get over the hour hand. You're a nice chap to have a watch!"

It might have occurred to Charlie (as it did to me) that whatever sort of watch-owner the former might be, a boy who successively shook, tickled, and roasted me to get me to go, was hardly the one to lecture him on his failings; but my master was too delighted at the prospect of having his treasure cured to be very critical of the physician. And this time, at last, Tom Drift had found the real cause of my indisposition. In endeavouring to pass one another at half-past six, my two hands had become entangled, and refusing to proceed in company, had stopped where they were stopping my circulation and indeed my animation at the same time.

Once more the astute Tom produced his pin; and sticking it under the end of my minute-hand, disengaged it from its fellow and bent it back into its proper position. Instantly, as if by magic, the life rushed back into my body; my circulation started afresh, and my heart beat its old beat. Charlie set up a shout of jubilation, and almost hugged Tom in his gratitude. The latter looked very wise and very condescending—as had he not a right?—and, handing me back to my master, said, with the air of a physician prescribing a course of treatment for a convalescent patient,—

"You'd better shove him on to the right time, and then keep him quiet, young un."

This Charlie did, and it would be hard to say which of us two was the happier at that moment.

I had scarcely been deposited once more into my accustomed pocket, when a loud bell sounded down the corridors, and made Tom Drift jump as if he had been shot.

"I say, that's the prayer-bell! Come on! unless you want to get into a jolly row."

And without further words he seized the astonished Charlie by the arm, and ran with him at full speed along one or two empty passages, dashing at last in through a big door, which was in the very act of closing as the two reached it.

Charlie was so confused, and so out of breath with this astonishing and frantic race, that for a minute he did not know whether he was standing on his head or his heels.

There was, however, no time for solving the problem just then, for Tom Drift, still retaining his grasp on his arm, dragged him forward, whispering,—

"This way; wasn't that a close shave? Get in here, and don't make a noise."

Charlie obeyed, and found himself in a pew, one of a congregation of some two hundred boys, assembled in the school chapel for evening prayers. At the far end of the chapel he could hear a man's voice, reading; but what it said it was impossible for him to make out, owing to the talking that was going on around him.

He looked eagerly and curiously down the long rows of his new schoolfellows, feeling half afraid at the sight of so many new faces, and half proud of being a Randlebury boy, with a right to a seat in the chapel. And as he looked he saw some faces he thought he should like, and some that he thought he would dislike; there were merry, bright-eyed boys, like himself, and there were ill-tempered, sullen-looking boys; there were boys haggard with hard-reading, and boys who looked as if their heads were altogether empty.

But what puzzled and troubled Charlie not a little was to notice, that though the school was supposed to be at prayers, and though most of them must have been within hearing of the reader's voice, a considerable proportion of the boys before him were neither listening nor evincing in their behaviour the slightest sign of reverence for the service in which they were engaged.

He was sorry to see that Tom Drift was laughing and whispering with his companions; entertaining them with an account of the way in which he had set the new "young un's" watch to rights, and what a shave they had from being shut out from prayers. (Charlie wondered, as he noticed all this, whether, after all, he would have lost much good if that misfortune had happened.) And one or two boys were chewing toffee; at least, Charlie thought it must be toffee, their mouths were so brown, and they made such a noise over the process of mastication; some, with their hands in their pockets, were listlessly staring up at the roof; and some were reading books, anything but prayer-books, under the desk.

Charlie did his best to attend to what the invisible and inarticulate voice was saying, and tried to recall what his father had told him about not letting new scenes and new companions tempt him to forget of neglect the lessons of duty and religion which he had learned at his parents' home; but it was not easy work, and to him it was a relief when all was over, and the boys proceeded to file out of the chapel.

"Where are they all going?" he inquired, turning round to where Tom Drift had been standing.

That young man, however, was no longer there. He had gone off to enjoy the questionable luxury of roast potatoes in a friend's study, entirely forgetting his young and forlorn charge.

Charlie was puzzled. He was sure he could never find his way back to Mrs Packer's through such a maze of passages, and he knew not where else to go.

As he stood watching in despair the last remnant of his fellow-worshippers passing out, and wondering what was to become of him, he became aware of two big boys stopping in front of him and looking at him.

"That's him!" said one, whose grammar was perhaps not his strongest point at this moment.

"Why, he's only a kid!" said the other, who, being sixteen, felt fully justified in so designating my young master.

"I can't help that, I know it's him," said the first.

"I say, you fellow," added he, addressing Charlie, "wasn't it you drove up to the front door in a cab this afternoon?"

Charlie trembled in his shoes. More than once had his heart misgiven him, he had committed an unpardonable offence in the mode of his advent to Randlebury; and now, with these two awful accusers before him, he felt as if his doom was come.

"I'm very sorry," he began; "yes, it was—I didn't mean, I'm sure."

"What did you do it for, if you didn't mean, you young muff?—why don't you go off to bed?"

"Because I don't know where to go, and Tom Drift—"

"Do you know Tom Drift?"

"Yes—that is, I met his mother," stammered Charlie, becoming more and more embarrassed.

Both the big boys burst out laughing. "What a treat for his mother!" said one. "I suppose she told you Tom was a real nice boy?"

"Yes."

"I thought so; so he is, isn't he, Joe?" and both boys laughed again.

"And she gave you a kiss to take to him?"

"No," said Charlie, blushing scarlet; "she did give me a kiss, but not for him."

It was a hard effort for the poor boy to come out with this admission, but candour compelled it.

"Oh, she gave you one for yourself, did she?" and again they laughed. "What a dear old noodle she must be!"

"She was very kind to me," said Charlie, not liking to hear his friend made fun of.

Just then a master came by.

"What are you three boys doing here?" he asked.

"Please, sir, this is a new boy," replied he who had been called Joe, "and he doesn't know where to go."

"Hum!" said the master, "I thought Mrs Packer would have seen after that. Let me see. You had better take him to your dormitory to-night, Halliday; there's a vacant bed there. Bring him to the doctor's room after breakfast to-morrow," and he passed on.

"Here's a treat!" exclaimed Joe, with a not ill-natured grin. "This comes of stopping and talking to young scarecrows. Come along, youngster; think yourself lucky you've been handed over to me. I wear patent leather boots, and they don't need as much blacking as some of the fellows'."

Charlie was at a loss to understand what the material of Master Halliday's boots had to do with his own alleged good fortune in falling into the hands of such a guardian; but he said nothing, and, reassured by the good-humoured face of his conductor, followed him cheerfully from the chapel.

"Hullo, Joe! got a donkey at last?" cried some one, as the two wended their way up the stairs leading to the dormitories.

"Looks like it," was Joe's reply.

It was not very long before Charlie learned that the four-footed beast thus vaguely referred to was a polite term which the big boys at Randlebury used to designate their fags.

"Come in here," said his conductor, turning in at a small door.

Charlie found himself inside a small apartment, measuring about ten feet square, lighted by a small window, warmed by a small fire, decorated with a small bookcase, and furnished with a small table, two small chairs, and a small cupboard.

"This is my den; and mind when you clean the window you don't crack that pane more than it is; and when you brush my things, you know, see the shelf isn't dirty, because I sometimes keep my worms there—do you hear? And now come along to bed; they put out lights at half-past nine."

The mention of the time recalled me instinctively to Charlie's thoughts. He could not resist the temptation, suggested half by anxiety and half by vanity, of taking me out and looking at me.

"Hullo! What, have you got a watch?"

"Yes," said Charlie meekly, not exactly knowing whether his companion would be admiring or indignant with him.

"More than I have," was all Joe's rejoinder.

Charlie's generosity was at once touched.

"Oh, never mind, we can go shares sometimes, if you like, you know," said he, not without an effort.

"I don't want your watch," was Master Halliday's somewhat ungracious reply. "Let's have a look at it, will you?"

He took me, and examined me; and evidently would not have objected to be the possessor of a watch himself, though he tried to make it appear it was a matter of indifference to him.

"Why don't you get your father to give you one?" asked Charlie innocently.

"Because I haven't got a father."

"Not got a father! Oh, I am sorry!" and the starting tears in the little fellow's eyes testified only too truly to his sincerity. "Look here," he added, "do take the watch, please; perhaps you would like it, and my father would give me another."

Joe Halliday gazed at his young fag in amazement.

"Why, you are a queer chap," he said. "I wouldn't take your watch for anything; but I tell you what, I'll ask you the time whenever I want to know."

"Will you really?" cried the delighted Charlie. "How jolly!"

"And look here," continued Halliday, "take my advice, and don't go offering your watch to everybody who hasn't got a father, or some of them might take you at your word, and then you'd look foolish. Come along now."

And he led the boy into the dormitory, where there were about twenty beds, most of them already occupied by boys, and the rest waiting for occupants, who were rapidly undressing in different parts of the room.

"Look sharp and tumble in," said Joe, pointing out the bed Charlie was to have. "There's only five minutes more."

Charlie, with all the naturalness of innocence, knelt, as he was always used to do, and said his prayers, adding a special petition for his dear absent parents, and another for the poor boy who hadn't got a father.

He was wholly unaware of the curiosity he had excited by his entrance into the dormitory, still less did he imagine the sensation which his simple act of devotion was creating. Twenty pairs of eyes stared at the unwonted spectacle of a boy saying his prayers, and many were the whispered comments which passed from lip to lip. No one however (had any been so inclined) stirred either to disturb or molest him—an immunity secured to him as much perhaps by the fact of his being under the protection of so redoubtable a champion as Halliday as by any special feeling of sympathy for his act.

The good example was not, however, wholly lost, for that same night, after the lights were out, and when silence reigned in the room, more than one boy covered his head with his sheet and tried to recall one of the early prayers of his childhood.

As for Charlie, with me and the knife under his pillow, he slept the sleep of the just, and dreamt of home; and I can answer for it his weary head never turned once the livelong night.

Chapter Five.

How my master entered and quitted the head master's study twice in one morning.

Charlie's first care in the morning was, as I need hardly say, to pull me out from under his pillow, and consult me as to the time. None of his companions were astir, so that, not having anything particular to do, he lay still, and abandoned himself to the luxury of an idle half-hour in bed.

His spirits were so greatly revived by his night's rest that he forgot both the novelty and the loneliness of his position, and fell to polishing first his knife and then me as merrily as if he were at home. What a difference a sound sleep often makes in the aspect of our affairs! Twelve hours ago he had felt as if he could never be sufficiently bold as to whistle within the walls of Randlebury, and now the first sight and sound which greeted Halliday's returning senses, as he sat up and rubbed his eyes, was his young *protégé* whistling to himself like a lark, and brightening me up with all his might with the corner of his blanket till I glowed again at nearly a red heat.

"Who's that kicking up that row whistling?" growled a voice from the far end of the room; "because I'd like to shy a boot at his head."

At this Charlie subsided, not desiring to gratify his unknown auditor in his benevolent desire, and very soon after jumped up and dressed himself.

"Look here, youngster," said Joe, "you'd better do my study now, as you mayn't have time after breakfast to-day. You know which room it is—the sixth on your right when you get downstairs. Cut along, look sharp, you've a good half-hour."

Charlie made his way down to the lion's den, meeting on his way several other discontented fags, bound on similar errands. He set himself to clean the window, tidy the cupboard, and generally put things square, and had succeeded fairly well in this endeavour by the time his patron made his appearance.

"What's the time?" inquired that lord of creation, running his eye rapidly round the room at the same time, to notice how his fag had done his duty.

"It's five minutes to eight," replied Charlie, after consulting me, and highly delighted to be thus appealed to.

"Come along to breakfast, then. You'll have to sit at a different table from me; but mind and wait for me afterwards, for I've got to take you to the doctor."

So Charlie was conducted down to the hall to breakfast, and provided with a humble seat at the foot of the lowest table, while Joe Halliday made his way with all the dignity that became his years to a distinguished place at the highest.

My master found himself among a set of noisy little boys, who amused themselves during the greater part of the meal by interchanging volleys of bread pellets, which much oftener missed their marks than reached them, in consequence of which he himself came in for the brunt of the cannonade. Once he ventured to return one of the random shots which had found its way to his fingers. Fortune favoured his aim, and his shaft hit the boy it was intended for full in the eye.

"Who did that?" cried the wounded hero sharply.

"I did," replied Charlie, quite proud of his achievement.

"All right, I'll punch your head for it when we get outside."

This was by no means what Charlie had expected. He had imagined the wound would be received in the same spirit of jest in which it was aimed.

"It was only in fun," he explained; "did it hurt you?"

"Of course it did," exclaimed the injured youth, who till Charlie's arrival had been the junior pupil of the school, and was now delighted to find some one below himself in the scale of seniority. "Of course it did, and you'll catch it."

All the other boys laughed, and Charlie, who could not find it in him to be overawed by even so majestic a hero as little Master Johnny Walker, made the best of his position.

"Look here," he said, "I'll give you three shots at my mouth, and if you—"

"There's too much talking at table six!" exclaimed an awful voice, and instantly every voice was hushed, including Charlie's, who blushed to the roots of his hair, and felt as if he had been singled out before the whole school as a rioter. He gulped down his breakfast without further argument with Master Walker, and was relieved, when the meal was over, to find that that doughty

warrior appeared to have altered his mind about punching his youthful head.

After some time he saw Halliday beckoning to him from the other side of the room.

"Now you've got to go to the doctor," said he; "come along."

This was the first time my master had fully realised the solemn nature of the approaching interview, and I felt his heart flutter as he inquired,—

"I say, what will he say to me?"

"Oh, all sorts of things; you'd better mind what you're up to, I can tell you," was the reassuring reply.

"Do you think I shall get in a row for driving the cab yesterday?" faltered Charlie.

"Shouldn't wonder," was the reply.

"Oh, dear! And do you think he saw me hit Johnny Walker in the eye at breakfast?"

"What, were you the boy who was kicking up all that row? My eye! you're in for it! Here you are; I'll knock for you."

And giving the poor trembling boy not so much as an instant in which to collect his flurried ideas, Joe gave a rap at the door, which was answered at once by a sharp "Come in!" from within.

"Now then," said Halliday, "in you go."

Charlie's knees shook under him, and he hung back from that awful door in mute terror.

"Come in!" again cried the voice.

"Do you hear, you young muff?" exclaimed Halliday. "Won't you catch it! Go in, will you?"

And opening the door himself he fairly pushed my poor master into the head master's study.

Fancy the agony of the poor boy, fully believing himself a doomed miscreant, entering for the first time the awful presence of the head master of Randlebury School.

He stood there with downcast eyes, not daring to speak, and rooted to the spot.

"Why, what's the matter, my boy?"

At the words Charlie started like one electrified. He had surely heard that voice before somewhere! He looked up, and what was his astonishment to find in his dreaded principal no other than the gentleman with whom he had yesterday spent such a friendly hour in the train between Gunborough and Randlebury!

And his face was as kind as ever, and his voice encouraging, as he repeated,—

"What's the matter, my man? has the watch stopped."

"Oh, sir," said Charlie, running up to him, "I am glad it's you, and I'm so sorry I drove the cab, and hit Walker in the eye. I'll never do it again!"

"Tut, tut," said the head master; "if you never do any worse than that, you won't go far wrong. I didn't tell you who I was yesterday, because I wanted you to manage for yourself, and fight your own battle on first arriving. Now tell me how you have got on."

And Charlie faithfully recounted to him everything, including my sudden indisposition, and my cure by Tom Drift.

Dr Weldon (for that was his name) listened to his story, and then said,—

"Well, you've made a pretty good beginning. Now try to remember this: your father has sent you here for two reasons; one is that your head may be furnished, and the other is that your character may be trained. I and your teachers can undertake the first; but it depends chiefly on you how the second succeeds. You will constantly be having to choose for yourself between what is right and what is wrong, and between what is true and what is false. Take the advice of one who has passed through all the temptations you are likely to meet here—rely always on a wisdom that is better than your own, and when once you see which way duty calls, follow that way as if your life depended on it. Do this, and you'll turn out a far better man than the man who is talking to you. Whenever you are in trouble come to me, I shall always be glad to see you. I promised you, you know, I would ask for you occasionally, didn't I? And now let's see what you've got in your head."

And then followed a brief examination, conducted in a way which put Charlie quite at his ease, and so enabled him to acquit himself with a fair amount of credit and win from his master a commendation, which he prized not a little, for it was that his father's efforts had not been wasted on him.

"You will be put in the second-form," said the doctor, "and if you work hard, I see no reason why you should not get up into the third next midsummer. Now, good-bye. I hope you won't find the head master of Randlebury is as 'stiff and stuck-up a fellow' as you dreaded, and I trust I shall find you as honest and brave a fellow as I hoped you would turn out the first time I saw you. Good-bye."

Charlie rose to leave with overflowing heart. He even forgot in the midst of his pleasant emotion to inquire, as he had fully intended to do, after the doctor's watch, and if it was still a quarter of an hour fast.

As he left the room he could not help contrasting with thankfulness his present state of mind with that in which he had entered it an hour ago. He laughed at himself for all his foolish fears then, and as for the future, that seemed now ever so much easier and brighter.

Outside the door he found Tom Drift passing along the corridor in a state of great excitement.

"The very chap, I declare," cried he. "I say, lend us your watch, young un, will you?"

"What for?" asked Charlie.

"Only a time race. Tom Shadbolt says he can run a mile in 4.40. I say he can't do it under 4.50, and we've got a bet of half-a-crown a side upon it. So lend us your watch to time him by."

Charlie hesitated, and a pang passed through his breast. He knew that one of the things which he had promised his father was that he would have nothing to do with betting or gambling in any form, and how could he obey in this respect if he now lent me for the purpose for which I was required? And yet he owed Tom Drift no common gratitude for the good service he had done in setting me right yesterday, and surely if any one had a right to borrow me it was he. The struggle was a sore one, but soon decided.

"I can't lend it you, Tom Drift."

"Why ever not?" asked Tom sharply.

"I'm very sorry; if it had been anything else—but I promised father I would not gamble."

"Young ass! who wants you to gamble? I only want you to lend us your watch."

"*You* are gambling, though," said Charlie timidly.

"And what's that got to do with you, you young idiot," exclaimed Drift, fairly losing his temper, "if I am?"

"I'm very sorry," said Charlie, "especially as you put it all right. If it was anything else; but I can't for this."

"Look here," said Drift in a fury, "we've had fooling enough. Hand me the watch this moment, or I'll take it and smash it, and you into the bargain!"

"Oh, Tom Drift, don't do that. I would so gladly for anything else, but I promised father—"

"Once more, will you, or will you not?"

"I can't."

"Then take that!" and next moment Charlie received a blow full on the chest, which sent him staggering back against the wall.

Oh, how he wished that moment he had never owned me!

Tom came upon him with an angry oath, and seized him by the throat.

"Will you give it up?"

"No," replied Charlie.

He was fairly roused now; no boy—certainly no boy of his sort—can stand quietly by and receive undeserved blows. Tom tightened his grip on the boy's throat, and strove to snatch me from his pocket.

Quick as thought Charlie threw his arms round him, and, though the smaller boy of the two, extricated himself from the clutch of the bully, and sent him in turn staggering back. Livid with rage, Tom rushed at him; but Charlie eluded him, and left him to

overbalance himself and fall sprawling on the paved floor. At this instant the doctor's door opened, and the head master stood gazing on the scene.

Poor Charlie! five minutes ago so full of bright hopes and brave resolutions, and now, under the eyes of the very man who had inspired in him those hopes and resolutions, engaged in a common fight with a schoolfellow!

"What is all this?" asked the doctor sternly. "Come in here, you two."

Charlie, with sinking heart, entered again that solemn room, and Drift followed, sulky, and with a black bruise on his forehead.

Charlie left his antagonist to tell his story after his own fashion, and was too dispirited either to contradict him or seek to justify himself. He felt ashamed of himself, and in his self-humiliation saw neither defence nor extenuation for his conduct.

Drift was dismissed with a few sharp words of reproof and warning. Charlie remained longer.

What the doctor said to him, and what he said to the doctor, I need not here repeat. Suffice it to say, the former was able to form a fairer estimate of my master's conduct than he himself was. He did not blame him; he even told him that no boy could expect to get through his school days without some blows, and advised him to see they were always on the right side. He talked to him long and seriously about home, and so comforted him in prospect of future difficulties and temptations, that when he left that study the second time, it was as a wiser, though perhaps a sadder boy than before.

Chapter Six.

How my master had both his friends and his enemies at Randlebury.

The events of Charlie's first day at Randlebury had at least taught him one salutary lesson, and that was, to moderate his enthusiasm with regard to me, and consequently for the next few weeks I had a quiet time of it. True enough, my master would occasionally produce me in confidence to a select and

admiring audience, and would ever and again proffer the use of me to his protector, Joe Halliday, but he gave up flourishing me in the face of every passer-by, and took to buttoning his jacket over the chain, I found my health all the better for this gentler usage, and showed my gratitude by keeping perfect time from one week's end to the other.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that Charlie was not long in making friends at Randlebury. Indeed some of his acquaintance looked upon this exceeding friendliness in the boy's disposition as one of his weak points.

"I do believe," said Walcot, who was only four from the head of the school, to his friend, Joe Halliday, one day, about a month after my master's arrival at Randlebury—"I do believe that young fag of yours would chum up to the poker and tongs if there were no fellows here."

"Shouldn't wonder," said Joe. "He's a sociable young beggar, and keeps my den uncommon tidy. Why, only the other day, when I was in no end of a vicious temper about being rowed about my Greek accents, you know, and when I should have been really grateful to the young scamp if he'd given me an excuse for kicking him, what should he do but lay wait for me in my den with a letter from his father, which he insisted on reading aloud to me. What do you think it was about?"

"I couldn't guess," said Walcot.

"Well, you must know he's lately chummed up very thick with my young brother Jim in the second, and—would you believe it?—he took it into his head to sit down and write to his governor to ask him if he would give Jim and me each a watch like the one he's got himself. What do you think of that?"

"Did he, though?" exclaimed Walcot, laughing. "I say, old boy, you'll make your fortune out of that youngster; and what did his father say?"

"Oh, he was most polite, of course; his boy's friends were his friends, and all that, and he finished up by saying he hoped we should both come and spend Christmas there."

"Ha! ha! and did he send the watches?"

"No; I suppose he wants to spy out the land first."

"Well," said Walcot, "the boy's all right with you, but he'll go making a fool of himself some day if he makes up to everybody he meets."

My master, in fact, was already a popular boy with his fellows. He had a select band of admirers among the youth of the Second-Form, who cackled round him like hens round a bantam. Together they groaned over their Latin exercises and wrestled with their decimals; together they heard the dreaded summons to the master's desk; and side by side, I am sorry to say, they held out their open palms to receive his cane. If a slate bearing on its surface an outline effigy of the gentleman who presided over the lessons of the class was brought to light, and the names of its perpetrators demanded, Charlie's hand would be seen among a forest of other upraised, ink-stained hands, and he would confess with contrition to having contributed the left eye of the unlucky portrait. And if, amid the solemn silence which attended a moral discourse from the master on the evils of gluttony, a sudden cataract of nuts, apples, turnips, and jam sandwiches on to the floor should drown the good man's voice, Charlie would be one of the ill-starred wights who owned to a partnership in the bag of good things which had thus miserably burst, and would proceed with shame first to crawl and grope on the dusty floor to collect his contraband possessions, and then solemnly to deposit the same jam, turnips, and all, on the desk of the offended dominie as a confiscated forfeit.

By these and many other like experiences Charlie identified himself with his comrades, and established many and memorable bonds of sympathy. He took the allegiance of his followers and the penalties of his masters in equal good part. He was not the boy to glory in his scrapes, but he was the boy to get into them, and once in, no fear of punishment could make a tell-tale, a cheat, or a coward of him.

With the elder boys he was also a favourite, for what big boy does not take pride in patronising a plucky, frank youngster? Patronising with Charlie did not mean humiliation. It is true he would quake at times in the majestic company of the heroes of the Sixth Form, but without hanging his head or toadying. It is one thing to reverence a fellow-being, and another to kneel and lick his boots.

Altogether Charlie had what is called "fallen on his feet" at Randlebury. By the end of two months he was as much at home there as if he had strutted its halls for two years. His whistle was as shrill as any in the lobbies, and Mrs Packer stuck her

fingers in her ears when he burst into her parlour to demand a clean collar. He had already signalised himself too on the cricket field, having scored one run (by a leg-bye) in the never-to-be-forgotten match of First Form, First Eleven, against Second-Form, Second Eleven; and he had annihilated the redoubtable Alfred Redhead in the hundred yards hopping match, accomplishing that distance in the wonderfully short time of forty-five seconds!

But the dearest of all his friends was Jim Halliday, his lord and master's young brother. To Jim, Charlie opened his own soul, and me, and the knife; with Jim he laid his schemes for the future, and arranged, when he was Governor-General of India and Jim was Prime Minister, he would swop a couple of elephants for one of Ash and Tackle's best twenty-foot fishing-rods, with a book of flies complete. With Jim, Charlie talked about home and his father, and the coming holidays, till his face shone with the brightness of the prospect. Nor was the faithful Jim less communicative. He told Charlie all about his sisters down at Dullfield, where his father had once been clergyman, and gave it as his opinion that Jenny was the one Charlie had better marry; and to Charlie he imparted, as an awful secret not to be so much as whispered to any one, that he (Jim) was going to array his imposing figure for the first time in a tail-coat at Christmas.

With two friends on such a footing of confidence, is it a wonder they clave one to the other in mute admiration and affection? Many a sumptuous supper, provided at the imminent peril of embargo by the authorities on the one hand, and capture by hungry pirates on the other, did they smuggle into port and enjoy in company; on many a half-holiday did they fish for hours in the same pool, or climb the same tree for the same nest; what book of Jim's was there (schoolbooks excepted) that Charlie had not dog's-eared; and was not Charlie's little library annotated in every page by Jim's elegant thumbs? In short, these two were as one. David and Jonathan were nothing to them.

But in the midst of all his comfort and happiness one continually recurring thought troubled Charlie, that was about Tom Drift. He had promised the mother to be a friend to her son, and although he owned to himself he neither liked nor admired Tom, he could not be easy with this broken promise on his mind.

One day, about a month after the quarrel outside the head master's study, my master, after a hard inward struggle,

conceived the desperate resolve of going himself to the lion in his den and seeking a reconciliation.

He walked quickly to Tom's study, for fear his resolution might fail him, and knocked as boldly as he could at the door.

"Come in!" cried Tom inside.

Charlie entered, and found his late antagonist sprawling on two chairs, reading a yellow-backed novel.

At the sight of Charlie he scowled, and looked anything but conciliatory.

"What do you want?" he said angrily.

"Oh, Tom Drift!" cried Charlie, plunging at once into his subject, "I do wish you'd be friends; I am so sorry I hurt you."

This last was an ill-judged reference; Tom was vicious enough about that bruise on his forehead not to need any reminder of the injuries he had sustained in that memorable scuffle.

"Get off with you, you little beast!" he cried. "What do you mean by coming here?"

"I know I've no business, Tom Drift; but I do so want to be friends, because—because I promised your mother, you know."

"What do I care what you promised my mother? I don't want you. Come, off you go, or I'll show you the way."

Charlie turned to go, yet still lingered. A desperate struggle was taking place, I could feel, within him, and then he stammered out, "I say, Tom Drift, if you'll only be friends I'll *give* you my watch."

Poor boy! Who knows what that offer cost him? it was indeed the dearest bribe he had to give.

Tom laughed sneeringly. "Who wants your watch, young ass?—a miserable, second-hand, tin ticker; I'd be ashamed to be seen with it. Come, once more, get out of here or I'll kick you out!"

Charlie obeyed, miserable and disappointed.

He could stand being spoken roughly to, he could bear his disappointment, but to hear his father's precious gift spoken of

as a "miserable, second-hand tin ticker," was more than he could endure, and he made his way back to his room conscious of having lost more than he had gained by this thankless effort at reconciliation.

"What are you in the sulks about?" inquired Halliday that evening, as Charlie was putting away his lord and master's jam in the cupboard.

"I don't want to be sulky," Charlie said, "but I wish I could make it up with Tom Drift."

"With who?" exclaimed Joe, who, as we have before observed, was subject to occasional lapses of grammar.

"Tom Drift, you know; we had a row the first day."

"I know," replied Joe; "about that everlasting watch of yours, wasn't it?"

"Yes," said Charlie, "I didn't like to lend it him, because—"

"I know all about that," said Halliday. "You were squeamish about something or other he wanted it for. Well, the watch belonged to you, I suppose, and you aren't obliged to lend it to anybody. What on earth do you want to go worrying about the thing any more for?"

"I'm not; only I wanted to be friends with Tom Drift."

"What for?" demanded Joe.

"Oh, because—because I promised his mother I would be," pleaded Charlie.

"All I can say is, you had no business to promise any one to be friends with a fellow you never saw."

"But she said he was a nice fellow; and besides he made my watch go when it had stopped," added Charlie, as a great argument.

"Why, Charlie, you are a greater little noodle than I took you for. Every one who calls that precious watch a good name is your master, and you're his slave."

"Not so bad as that, Joe," said Charlie; "but I say, isn't Tom Drift a nice boy, then?"

"Isn't he? that's all," replied the other. "I'm not going to abuse him behind his back, but take my advice, young un. You are better off as Tom's enemy than his friend, and don't you try to make up to him any more."

"Why not?" asked Charlie in bewilderment.

"Never you mind," was all Joe's reply; "and now hand me down my Liddell and Scott and make yourself scarce."

Charlie, sorely puzzled, did as he was bid.

He certainly was not in love with Tom Drift; but it was not easy for him to give up, without an effort, his promise to be his friend.

Tom, however, was by no means in need of friends. Not many weeks after the day when Charlie had left his study, disappointed and miserable, he might have been seen entertaining company of quite a different sort.

(My readers, let me here observe, must not be too curious to understand how it is I am able to speak of so many things which must have taken place beyond the range of my observation. They will find the reason all in good time.)

The supper party over which Tom presided consisted of four boys, including himself. One was Shadbolt, on whose account, it will be remembered, Tom had desired to borrow Charlie's watch. Shadbolt was an unwholesome-looking fellow of fifteen, with coarse features and eyes that could not look you straight in the face if they had tried. He was accompanied by his chum Margetson, who certainly had the advantage of his friend in looks, as well as in intellect. The quartet was completed by Gus Burke, one of the smallest and most vicious boys at Randlebury. He was the son of a country squire, who had the unenviable reputation of being one of the hardest drinkers and fastest riders in his county; and the boy had already shown himself only too apt a pupil in the lessons in the midst of which his childhood had been passed. He had at his tongue's tip all the slang of the stables and all the blackguardisms of the betting-ring; and boy—almost child—as he was, he affected the swagger and habits of a "fast man," like a true son of his father.

At Randlebury he had wrought incredible mischief. Tom Drift was not the only soft-minded vain boy whom he had infected by his pernicious example. Like all reckless swaggerers, he had his

band of admirers, who marked every action and drank in every word that fell from their hero's lips.

It was just with such boys as Drift that his influence was most telling; for Tom was a boy not without aptitude to note and emulate a powerful example, whether it were good or bad, while his vanity rendered him as pliant as wax to the hand of the flatterer.

Such was the party which assembled surreptitiously in Tom's study that evening and partook of the smuggled supper.

Tom had had hard work to provide for his guests, and had succeeded only at the risk of grave penalties if detected.

"I say, Tom, old horse, this is a prime spread!" said Gus; "where did you get it?"

"Oh!" said Tom, "I had a new hat coming from Tiler's, so I got old Tripes (the butcher) to make a neat brown-paper parcel of the kidneys, and got them up in my gossamer. The old donkey might have done the thing better though, for the juice squeezed through, and the inside of my hat looks as if I had lately been scalped."

"Hard lines! But never mind, perhaps they'll put it down to the crack you got on your forehead."

Tom flushed scarlet; any reference to his inglorious scuffle with Charlie Newcome was odious to him, as Gus and the others knew well enough. He said nothing, however, only scowled angrily.

"What!" said Gus, "does it hurt you still then? Never mind, it was a good shot, and I wouldn't be ashamed of having floored you myself."

"He didn't floor me; I fell!" cried Tom indignantly.

"Did you? Rather a way fellows have when they get knocked down!"

"I was not knocked down, Gus, I tell you; and you'd better shut up!"

"All right, old horse! you mustn't mind a bit of chaff. I'm sure you've taken it all very well."

"Yes," said Margetson, "everybody thinks you must take after your mother; you're such a sweet-tempered chap."

"What do you know about my mother?" snarled Tom.

"Only what your young friend tells everybody about her."

"What business has he to go talking all over the school about my affairs?" exclaimed Tom furiously. "What's my mother to do with him?"

"A great deal, it seems," replied Margetson, "for he promised her, on the strength of her assertion that you were a nice boy, to be your friend, and now he's awfully hurt you won't let him."

"I thought it was Tom who was awfully hurt," put in Gus, by way of parenthesis.

"I tell you what it is, you fellows," said Tom, "it may be all very funny for you, but I've had quite enough of it. Ever since that young canting humbug came here I've led the life of a dog. If, instead of making a fool of me, you'd tell me how I can pay him out, I should be better pleased."

"All very fine," said Margetson; "why don't you pay your own bills?"

"If you want some one to punch his head," said Shadbolt the ugly, "I don't mind trying; my life is insured."

"Suppose we make him stupid," suggested Gus, "with milk punch, and shove him inside the doctor's study."

"Couldn't you get hold of his watch and boil it?" said Margetson, who had heard of the experiments practised on me in Mrs Packer's parlour.

"If I got hold of it I'd smash it into fifty pieces!" growled Tom between his teeth.

"Look here, you fellows, I've got a glorious plan!" exclaimed Gus suddenly.

"What is it?" they all cried.

But Gus's plan requires a new chapter.

Chapter Seven.

How a pleasant treat in store was prepared for my master.

Gus proceeded then to divulge his plan for giving Tom Drift his revenge on my master.

"Let's take him to Gurley races on Saturday," said he. "You know it's a holiday, and if we can only get him with us, well astonish his sanctimonious young soul. What do you say?"

"You'll never get him to come," said Margetson.

"Won't we? Well see about that," replied Gus, "he needn't know where he's going."

"But even so," said Drift, "you won't get him; he's not in love with me, and I don't fancy any of you are much in his line."

"Oh, you'll have to manage that part, Tom. You know how the young idiot's pining to make it up with you, for your dear old mother's sake!"

"Now you needn't start that nonsense again," put in Tom sulkily.

"All right; but don't you see, if you were to take a forgiving fit and make up to him, and talk about the old lady and his watch, and all that, he'd be out of his wits with joy? and then if you asked him to come for a day's fishing on Saturday, we could meet you somewhere on the road, and then he'd have to come whether he liked or not; and won't we astonish him!"

Tom mused a little.

"It's not a bad idea," said he presently, "if it would only work. But I can't make up to the young puppy as you think. Ten to one I should stop short in the middle and kick him."

"That would spoil all the fun. Try it on, any way, it'll be a nice little excitement to have young Innocent with us. And now, Tom, where are blacks and reds; I'm just in the humour for a rubber, aren't you?"

The host produced from a locked desk a dirty and much-worn pack of cards, and the party sat down to play.

They played for penny points, and as Gus and Margetson were partners, it is hardly necessary to say that Drift and his ill-looking friend lost every game.

Before this amiable and congenial quartet separated, Gus had referred again to the scheme of getting Charlie to Gurley races, and got Drift to promise he would secure his victim next day.

Next day, accordingly, as Charlie was in the midst of a desperate game of fives with his friend Jim, a small boy came to him and said that Tom Drift wanted him.

"What for?" demanded Charlie, who, since his talk with the elder Halliday, had felt somewhat "shy" about Tom.

"I don't know," said the boy.

"Your turn, Charlie," called out Jim from the end of the court.

Charlie took his turn while he was revolving on his answer to this mysterious summons.

"What does that child want?" inquired Jim, with all the loftiness of a second-form boy speaking of a first.

"He says Tom Drift wants me."

"Whew!" whistled Jim, who of course knew the whole mystery of the affair between his chum and Tom; "tell him to go to Jericho! Look out for yourself!"

And so saying, he took his turn with the ball.

"That wouldn't do," said Charlie; "I don't want to rile him."

"*I'd* like to have a chance," retorted the implacable Jim. "Well, then, tell him you can't come. Here, young un, tell Tom Drift Charlie can't come. Do you hear? Cut your sticks!"

But Charlie called the messenger back. "I *could*, go if I wanted, Jim. Better tell him I'd rather not come. Say that, youngster—I'd rather not."

So off the youngster ran, and Charlie and Jim finished their game. Of coarse, the youthful messenger gave Tom a full, true, and particular account of this conversation in all its details, which rendered that young gentleman rather less eager than ever for his enterprise. However, he had the fear of Gus before

his eyes, and strolled out into the playground on the chance of coming across Charlie.

And he did come across him, arm-in-arm with the faithful Jim. Tom worked his face into the ghastly similitude of a friendly smile as he approached, and said, in as genial a voice as he could pretend, "I'm glad I met you, Newcome, because I want to speak to you, if you don't mind taking a turn round the playground."

Charlie, of course, was astonished; he had expected at the very least to be kicked over the wall when he saw Tom approach, and he was utterly at a loss to understand this not unfriendly greeting. Innocent boy! it never occurred to him the demonstration could be anything but real. Jim would have been a tougher subject to deal with. Indeed, as he let go Charlie's arm, and saw him walk off with Tom, he muttered to himself, not caring particularly whether the latter heard him or not.

"Gammon! that's what it is."

Charlie had not long to wait before his companion began the conversation.

"I suppose you wonder why I want you, Newcome?" said he. "The fact is, I've been thinking I wasn't altogether right in being down on you the other day about lending me that watch, especially as you were a new boy; and I'm sorry if I hurt you."

Charlie sprung towards him and caught his arm.

"Oh, Tom Drift, don't say that, please! It was my fault—all my fault, and I have been so sorry ever since. And you will be friends now, won't you? I do so want to be, because I promised your mother—"

Tom gave a quick gesture of impatience, which, if Charlie had understood, he would have known how near receiving a kick he was at that moment.

Tom, however, restrained himself, and said,—

"Oh, yes, for her sake I'd like to be friends, of course, and I hope you'll forget all about that wretched quarrel."

"Indeed I will," cried Charlie; "and don't let us say any more about it. I am ever so much happier now, and it was so good of you to come to me and make it up."

"Well," said Tom loftily, "you know it's no use for two fellows to be at loggerheads when it can be helped, and I dare say we shall get on all the better now. How are you going on in the second?"

Whereupon Charlie launched into a lengthy and animated account of his experiences, to which Tom pretended to listen, but scarcely heard a word.

"So you are fond of fishing?" he said, casually, after the boy had mentioned something on that subject.

"Ain't I, though?" cried Charlie, now quite happy, and his old self again. "I say, Tom Drift, would you like to see the new lance-wood top I've got to my rod? It's a stunner, I can tell you. I'll lend it you, you know, any time you like."

"Have you caught much since you were here!" asked Tom, anxious to get this hateful business over.

"No. You know the brook here isn't a good one for fish, and I don't know anywhere else near."

"Well, I'll tell you what," said Tom, as if the idea had then for the first time occurred to him. "Suppose we go off for a regular good day on Saturday? It's a holiday, you know, and we could go and try up the Sharle, near Gurley. There's lots of trout there, and we are certain to have a good day."

"How jolly!" exclaimed Charlie. "It would be grand. But I say, Tom Drift, are you sure you wouldn't mind coming? It wouldn't be a bother to you, would it?"

"Not a bit. I like a good day's fishing. But, I say, young un, you'd better not say anything about it to any one, or we shall have a swarm of fellows come too, and that will spoil all the sport."

"All right," said Charlie. "I say what a day we shall have! I'll bring my watch and knife, you know, and some grub, and we can picnic there, eh?"

"That'll be splendid. Well, I must go in now, so good-bye, Newcome, and shake hands."

What a grip was that! on one side all trust and fervour, and on the other all fraud and malice!

Tom Drift was not yet utterly bad. Would that he had allowed his conscience to speak and his better self prevail! Half a dozen times in the course of his walk from the playground to the school he repented of the wicked part he was playing in the scheme to injure Charlie. But half a dozen times the thought of Gus and his taunts, and the recollection of his own bruised forehead came to drive out all passing sentiments of pity or remorse.

Charlie rejoined his chum with a beaming face.

"Well," asked Jim, "what has he been saying to humbug you this time?"

"Nothing very particular; and I won't let you call him a humbug. I say, Jim, old boy, he's made it up at last, and we're friends, Tom Drift and I! Hurrah! I was never so glad, isn't it jolly?"

Jim by no means shared his friend's enthusiasm. Like his elder brother, he instinctively disliked Tom Drift, without exactly being able to give a reason.

His reserve, however, had no effect on Charlie's high spirits. At last the wish of his heart had been gained! No longer did he walk with the burden of a broken promise weighting his neck; no longer did the consciousness of having an enemy oppress him.

"Simpleton!" many of my readers will exclaim. Perhaps he was; but even if you laugh at him, I think you will hardly despise him for his simple-mindedness, for who would not rather be such a one than the tempter, Tom Drift?

All that week he was jubilant. Boys looked round in astonishment at the shrillness of his whistle and the ring of his laughter. His corner of the class room was a simple Babel, and the number of apples he bestowed in charity was prodigious.

Something, every one could see, had happened to make him happier than ever. Few knew what that something was, and fewer still knew what it meant.

"What are you up to to-morrow?" asked the elder Halliday of his fag on the Friday evening.

"Fishing," briskly replied the boy.

"You're for ever fishing," said Joe. "I suppose that young brother of mine is going with you?"

"No; Jim's going to play in the match against the Badgers."

The "Badgers," let me explain, was the name of a scratch cricket eleven made up of boys in the first, second and third forms.

"Are you going alone, then?"

Charlie felt uncomfortable as he answered,—

"No."

"Whom are you going with?" pursued the inquiring Joe.

"A fellow in the fifth who asked me to come."

"What's his name?"

Charlie had no help for it now.

"Tom Drift," he faltered.

"Tom Drift! I thought you and he were at loggerheads."

"Oh, don't you know we've made it up? He was awfully kind about it, and said he was sorry, when it was really my fault, and we shook hands, and to-morrow we are going to fish in a place he knows where there's no end of trout."

"Where's that?"

"He didn't want me to tell, for fear everybody should come and spoil the sport; but I suppose I can tell you, though; it's up the Sharle, near Gurley."

"Humph! I've fished there before now. Not such a wonderful lot of fish, either."

"I suppose you won't be there to-morrow?" asked Charlie nervously, afraid of losing the confidence of Tom Drift by attracting strangers to his waters.

"Not if I know it," replied Joe. "I say, youngster, I thought you had given up the notion of making up to that fellow?"

"I didn't make up to him, only I can't be sorry to be friends with him—"

"Well, I hope you won't be sorry now you've done it. Take care what you're about, that's all."

Charlie was again perplexed to understand why Halliday seemed to have such a dislike to poor Tom.

Just as he was going off to bed Joe stopped him and asked,—

"By the way, shall you be using your watch to-morrow?"

"Well, I promised I'd take it, to see how the time went; but I dare say we could do without it, and I would like to lend it to you, Halliday."

"Not a bit of it," replied the other. "I can do without it as well as you. I am going to walk over to Whitstone Woods and back."

"Hullo, that's a long trot," said Charlie. "It must be nearly thirty miles."

"Something like that," said Joe. "Walcot and I are going to make a day of it."

"Which way do you go?"

"Through Gurley, and then over Rushton Common and past Slingcomb."

"Never! I wish I could do thirty miles at a stretch."

"So you will some day. Good-night."

And Charlie went to bed, to dream of the lance-wood top of his rod and the trout in the Sharle.

In the meanwhile the conspirators had had another meeting in Drift's den.

"Well, have you hooked him?" asked Gus.

"Yes; it's all right. He took it all in like a lamb."

"And all the school," said Margetson, "is talking of the great reconciliation, and the gratification which that event will undoubtedly afford to your venerable mother."

"Shut up, will you, Margetson? I've had quite enough of that chaff."

"But I do assure you, Tom—"

"That'll do," said Tom, snappishly; and Margetson did not go the length of saying what it was he was so ready to assure him of.

"Well," said Gus, "we'll meet you and the young cub at the cross roads by Sharle Bridge. The races don't begin till twelve, so we shall have lots of time. I mean to see if we can't get a trap at Gurley, and do the thing in style. What do you say? We could get one for about ten bob."

"All serene," said Margetson. "I'll fork out my share."

"You'll pay for me, Tom," said Shadbolt, "won't you?"

"I'll see," said Tom.

"All right, that's settled; and you are seeing about grub, Tom, aren't you? Don't forget the etceteras. What time have you told young mooney-face?"

"Nine. He's sure to be in time."

"Well, we'll start a little before, you know, and meet you quite by accident, and the young beggar won't smell a rat till we are safe in Gurley."

"And if he turns cantankerous?"

"Then we can put Shaddy to look after him."

"Who's going to win the Gulley Plate, Gus?"

And then the party fell to canvassing the entries for the morrow's races, and making their bets, in which, of course, Tom stood almost bound to lose, whichever horse won.

Long ere they had parted company Charlie was sound asleep and dreaming, with me under his pillow.

Chapter Eight.

How my master did not catch the fish he expected.

About ten years before the time of my story it had happened that in a famous battle fought between her Majesty's troops and those of a hostile and savage king, the colours of the 300th Regiment were noticed to be in imminent peril of capture. The ensign who carried them was wounded, and already a score of the enemy were rushing forward to seize the prize and carry it off in triumph to their king. Suddenly, however, there dashed up to the spot a young cornet of dragoons, who, seeing the peril of his fellow-officer and the colours he carried, dragged him, flag and all, up nearly into his own saddle, and started off with his precious burden towards a place of shelter from the fire and spears of the savages. Before, however, he had gone twenty yards the poor ensign tumbled to the ground, shot through the heart, yielding with his dying hands his colours to the dragoon. That plucky young soldier, wrapping the torn and stained flag round his body, set his teeth, stooped forward in his saddle, and, digging his spurs into his horse, galloped for his life. He had a terrific gauntlet to run, and grandly he ran it. The friendly trench was in sight, the cheers of his comrades fell like music on his ears, a vision of glory and honour flashed through his mind, and then suddenly he reeled forward in his seat—a malignant shot had found him out at last, and, with the colours round him, he dropped from his horse into his comrades' arms a dead man.

This hero was an old Randlebury boy; and ever since that day, on every anniversary of his glorious death, Randlebury kept, and still keeps, holiday.

All this Charlie was informed of by his faithful chum, Jim Halliday, as the former was dressing himself on the morning of the eventful holiday in question.

What possessed him to get up at six, when he was not to start till nine, I cannot say. He even routed me from under his pillow at five, so fidgety was he, and as soon as ever I pointed to six he bounced out of bed as if he was shot.

"What are you up to, getting up at this time?" growled Jim, who, much to the mutual delight of the boys, slept in the same room with Charlie.

"Oh, you know; I don't want to be behindhand," replied Charlie.

"Behindhand! Why, do you know it's only just six?"

"I know that, and I mean to make the most of my holiday. I say, Jim, what do they want to give us a holiday for, do you know?"

"They don't want to at all; they've got to."

"Got to? What do you mean?" inquired Charlie, dragging on his boots.

And then Jim, with many yawns and growls, told him the story; and, without waiting for his comments thereon, rolled over and went off to sleep again.

Charlie spent his early hour in polishing up things generally. When he had polished up his rod with the lance-wood top, he polished up his green can and his hooks. Then he warmed me up with a piece of wash-leather, and then his many-fanged knife.

By the time these little jobs were accomplished, and Joe's study put in order, the breakfast bell sounded, and he went down with a mouth sore with whistling.

He caught sight of Tom Drift at another table, and nodded and waved his green can to him; he informed every boy within hearing distance that it was certain to be a fine day, whatever it looked like now; and he made the wildest and most indiscriminate promises to entertain his whole acquaintance at no end of a trout supper on the spoils of that day's sport. Twenty times during breakfast did he pull me out and look impatiently at my minute-hand slowly making its way from eight to nine; and as soon as ever the meal was over he rushed upstairs like mad for his rod and bag, and then tore down again four steps at a time, nearly knocking the head master over at the bottom.

"Gently, my man," said that gentleman, recognising in this cannon-ball of a young fellow his little travelling companion. "Why, what's the matter?"

"I beg your pardon, doctor," said Charlie; "did I hurt you?"

"Not a bit. So you are going to fish to-day?"

"Yes, sir," said the beaming Charlie. "I say, sir, do you think it'll be a fine day?"

"I hope so—good-bye. I suppose this can will be full when you come back?"

"Good-bye, sir," said Charlie, secretly resolving that if fortune favoured him he would present the two finest of his trout to the doctor.

He found Drift ready for him when he reached that young gentleman's study.

Besides his rod, Tom had a somewhat cumbersome bag, which, as it carried most of the provisions for the whole party, he was not a little surly about being burdened with.

Charlie, of course, thought it was his and Tom's dinner.

"Is that the grub?" he cried. "Why, Tom Drift, you have been laying in a spread! What a brick you are! Look here, I'd carry it—isn't it a weight, though! If we get all this inside us two we shan't starve!"

And so they started, Charlie lugging along the bag and whistling like a lark.

"Looks cloudy," said Tom, who felt he must say something or other.

"Never mind, all the better for the trout, you know. I say, I wish I had my fly on the water this minute."

As Tom was silent, Charlie kept up the conversation by himself.

"I say, Tom Drift," said he, "if your mother could only see us two chaps going off for a day's fishing she—"

"Look here, draw it mild about my mother, young un. She can take care of herself well enough."

Charlie blushed to the roots of his hair at this rebuke, and for some time the flow of his conversation was arrested.

It was a good four miles from Randlebury to Sharle Bridge; and long ere they reached it Charlie's arm ached with the ponderous bag he was carrying. He did not, however, like to say anything, still less to ask Tom to take a turn at carrying it; so he plodded on, changing hands every few minutes, and buoying himself up with the prospect of the river and the trout.

Presently they came within sight of the signpost which marks the junction of the Gurley and Sharle Bridge roads.

"Here we are at last!" cried Charlie, panting and puffing. "I say, Tom Drift, I don't believe I could have carried this bag any farther if I'd tried."

"It'll be lighter when we go home. Hullo! who are these three?" for at this moment Gus, Margetson, and Shadbolt made their appearance.

"They look like Randlebury fellows by their caps. Oh, I know who one of them is," added Charlie— "Margetson, in the fourth; don't you know him?"

"Rather!" replied Tom; "and the other two are Shaddy and Gus. Who'd have thought of meeting *them*!" and he gave a whistle, which succeeded in attracting the attention of the worthy trio.

Of course their surprise at meeting Tom and his companion was no less great—in fact, they had to inquire who the youngster was.

"Where are you off to?" demanded Gus.

"We're going to try our luck up the Sharle," said Tom.

"You'll be sold if you do," said Gus. "We were down looking at it, and a pretty state it's in. Old Skinner at the Tannery took it into his head to leave his gates up last night, and his muck has got into the river and poisoned every fish in it—hasn't it, Shad?"

"Rather!" replied Shad. "I was glad enough to get my nose away from the place."

"Here's a go, Charlie!" said Tom, turning to his young companion.

During this short conversation Charlie had passed through all the anguish of a bitter disappointment. It is no light thing to have the hope of days snuffed out all in a moment, and he was ready to cry with vexation. However it couldn't be helped, and he had learned before now how to take a disappointment like a man. So when Tom appealed to him he put a good face on it, and said,—

"Awful hard lines. Never mind, let's go back and see the match with the Badgers, Tom."

"Why don't you come with us?" asked Gus. "We are going to Gurley; have you ever been to Gurley, young un?"

"No," said Charlie.

"Come along, then, we'll show it you. It's a prime town, isn't it, Margetson?"

"Don't ask me," said Margetson; "I'd sooner see about Gurley than catch a seven-pounder, any day."

"And besides," said Tom, "isn't there some good fishing above the lock! Come along, Charlie; we shall not be baulked of our day's sport after all."

Charlie joined the party, although he did not conceive any great admiration for Tom's three friends. His anxiety not to offend his now reconciled enemy, and the possibility of fishing after all, overruled him; and still dragging the bag, he trudged along with the others towards Gurley.

As they approached the town he could not help noticing the number of holiday-makers and vehicles that passed them. There were drags full of gaily-dressed ladies; and gentlemen who wore veils; and there were light jaunty dog-carts with spruce young white-hatted gentlemen perched in them; there were vans in which corks were popping like musketry fires and parties on foot like themselves, hurrying forward with loud laughter and coarse music.

"Surely," thought he, "there's something on at Gurley."

Presently a waggonette, driven by a very loud youth in a check suit, and with an enormous cigar in his mouth, pulled up in passing, and its driver addressed Gus.

"So you've found *your* way here, have you, my young bantam? Catch *you* being out of a good thing. Are you going on the grand stand?"

"Don't know," said Gus grandly. "We may pick up a trap in the town."

"Ho, ho! going to do it flash, are you? Well, there's one of you could do with a little spice," added he, glancing at Charlie. "I suppose my trap's not grand enough for you."

"Can you give us a lift, then, Bill?" asked Gus, charmed at the idea.

"Yes, to be sure; I've no company to-day. There's just room. Hop in. I may as well turn an honest penny as not. Here, you young sinner, jump up beside me on the box." And before Charlie knew where he was or whither he was going he found himself on the box of the waggonette beside the flash youth, and his four friends behind him inside.

"Who's your friend, Gus?" he heard Margetson ask.

"Son of Belsham, who keeps the 'Green Tiger' at Randlebury. We're in luck, I can tell you, you fellows."

As Charlie gradually recovered from his bewilderment he felt himself extremely uncomfortable and ill at ease. From what had been said he had gathered that the object of the boys in going to Gurley was something more than to see the town; and he by no means liked Gus's new friend, or approved of his easy familiarity with a low publican's son. It was not long before his dawning suspicions were fully confirmed.

"So you're going to see the races?" asked Mr Belsham.

"No, I'm not," replied Charlie, as curtly as he could, for he had no desire to encourage the conversation of this objectionable person.

"Ain't you? And what are you going to do, then, my young lamb?" And in the course of this brief sentence Mr Belsham succeeded in interjecting at least three oaths.

"I shan't speak to you if you swear," said Charlie; "it's wrong to swear."

"No! is it? Who says that?"

"My father says so," blurted out Charlie, fully satisfied that no better reason could be demanded.

Belsham laughed, and turning to the four inside, said,—

"I say, young gentlemen, this young pippin tells me he's got a father who says it's wrong to swear. What do you think of that?"

"His father must be an amusing man," replied Gus.

"Wait till we get on to the course," said Margetson; "he'll hear something to astonish him there, young prig!"

"I'm not going to the races!" cried my master, starting from his seat, and now fully alive to the fraud of which he had been made the victim. "How could you do this, Tom Drift! Let me down, will you!" and he struggled so desperately with Belsham that that gentleman was obliged to let go the reins in order to hold him.

Of course it was no use his resisting. Amid the shouts and jeers of his schoolfellows he was held on to the box. In vain he pleaded, besought, struggled, threatened; there he was compelled to stay, all through Gurley and out to the racecourse. Here he found himself in the midst of a yelling, blaspheming, drunken multitude, from the sight of whose faces and the sound of whose words his soul revolted so vehemently that it lent new vigour to his exhausted frame, and urged him to one last desperate struggle to free himself and escape from his tormentors.

"Look here," said Belsham to Gus; "if you suppose I'm going to have all my fun spoiled by looking after this cub of yours while you're enjoying yourselves there inside, you're mistaken; here, look after him yourselves."

So saying, he dragged Charlie from his seat and swung him down into the waggonette with such force that he lay there half stunned and incapable of further resistance, and so for the time being saved his persecutors a good deal of trouble.

And indeed had it been otherwise it is hardly likely they would have just then been able to pay him much attention, for at that moment the horses were all drawn up at the starting-post, waiting for the signal to go.

That was a feverish moment for Tom Drift. He had bet all his money on one horse, and if that horse did not win, he would lose every penny of it.

As usual, he had repented a hundred times of that day's business, and the last brutal outrage on poor Charlie had called up even in his seared breast a fleeting feeling of indescribable shame. It was, alas! only fleeting.

Next moment he forgot all but the horses. There they stood in a long restless line. A shout! and they were off. In the first wild scramble he could catch a sight of the colours on which his

hopes depended near the front. On they came like the wind. A man near shouted the name of Tom's horse—"It's winning," and Tom's head swam at the sound. On still nearer, and now they have passed. In the retreating, straggling crowd he can see his horse still, but it seems to be going back instead of forward. Like a torrent the others overhaul and pass it. Then a louder shout than usual proclaims the race over, and the favourite beaten, and Tom staggers down to his seat sick and half stupid.

"Never mind, old man," he heard Gus say, "luck's against you this time; you'll have your turn some day. Take some of this, man, and never say die."

And Tom, reckless in his misery, took the proffered bottle, and drank deeply.

It was late in the afternoon before Belsham thought of turning his horse's head homeward, and by that time Charlie, on the floor of the waggonette, was slowly beginning to recover consciousness.

Chapter Nine.

How my master and I had quite as much excitement in one afternoon as was good for us.

Just as they were turning to go, a sudden shout and rush of people arrested them. The crowd on the course had been immense, and of the roughest and lowest description: sharpers, thieves, and roughs were there by the hundred, attracted from the neighbouring villages by the opportunity of plunder and riot which Gurley races always afforded. As soon as the serious business of the racing was over, this low mob naturally sought excitement of their own making, and increasing in disorder and intemperance as the day wore on, had become beyond control just about the time when Mr Belsham, junior, took it into his muddled head to make a start in the direction of home. The shout which kept him where he was, was occasioned by that spectacle dear to the eyes of all blackguards, a fight. Round the two blood and dust-stained combatants, the mob surged and yelled. Every moment it grew denser and wilder; and every moment it swayed nearer and nearer to the spot where the Randlebury boys stood in their waggonette; and before they could move or get clear, they found themselves in the very centre of the mob. Shouts, shrieks, and wild laughter rose on

every side of them; some of the crowd scrambled up onto their wheels to get a glimpse of the pugilists; some abused and swore at them for getting in the way; some tried to invade their waggonette, and struck at them when they resisted.

In the midst of all, Belsham's horse took fright. There was a wild plunge, a shriek from the crowd in front, and next moment the five boys were thrown down among the crowd, while the horse, with the shattered and overturned vehicle behind him, forced for himself a ghastly lane through the mob.

Of Gus and his three friends, Charlie, whom the shock roused to sudden consciousness, could see nothing. He tried to rise, but the crowd pressed too wildly to give him the chance. For some moments he lay among a host of crowding, struggling feet, expecting every moment to be stunned, if not killed. But by a wonderful providence he escaped the peril. The crowd gave a sudden swing in a new direction, and he was left unhurt, though stupefied and almost unable to stir.

Presently he was conscious of a man standing in front of him.

"Oh, help me!" gasped my poor master.

The man seized him roughly by the arm and raised him to his feet.

"That's worth a tip," he growled; "come, hand over."

Charlie put his hand in his pocket and drew out a shilling.

The man scowled.

"Do you suppose I'll take a dirty shilling? Come, young swell, empty out them pockets. Look sharp, I've no time to waste on the like of you."

Tremblingly Charlie obeyed, and gave the man all the little stock of money he possessed.

But he was not yet to escape. From under his jacket the greedy eye of the thief had caught a glimpse of a chain. With a rough hand he tore open the coat. "What, a ticker? Here's luck; out with it, come."

"Oh," cried Charlie, "take anything but that! Take my chain and my knife, but not my watch?"

Hardly and brutally laughed the man as he snatched me out of the poor boy's hand, and administering a parting cuff on the head of his victim, turned to walk off with me in the recesses of one of his filthy pockets.

Scarcely, however, had he turned, when three men appeared in front of him, coming in the direction of Charlie. The boy saw them, and imagine his joy when in one of the party he recognised his old acquaintance, the cabman Jim! With a sudden bound and cry of delight he rushed towards him, shouting and pointing to the robber. "Oh, Jim, he's taken my watch; get my watch back, Jim."

Jim took in the state of affairs in an instant, and calling on his two companions to follow him, rushed upon and secured the thief before the latter was even aware of their intention. It was vain for one man to resist three. He was forced to disgorge first me, then the knife, and then the money. Charlie indeed pleaded that they should leave him the money, or some of it, but this proposal Jim scouted, and in his zeal relieved the robber of a good deal more than he had stolen from Charlie. Then with kicks and blows they drove the wretch away as fast as his legs could carry him.

This done, Jim the cabman had an opportunity of renewing his acquaintance with my master.

"Well," said he, "who'd have thought of seeing *you* here? And what a nice mess you're in. You look as if—"

"Oh, don't," cried Charlie, holding him by the arm; "it's bad enough as it is, without you thinking ill of me."

And then he told him as well as he could how he had been decoyed to these vile races; how he had been kept there by main force; how he had been made senseless by their rough treatment, and how, but for Jim's timely help, he would now have been robbed and helpless.

Jim listened in astonishment, not unmingled with many an ejaculation of indignation at the poor boy's persecutors.

"And where are they now?" he asked, when Charlie had done.

"I don't know. We were all thrown out, you know, among the crowd. I only hope they've not been killed."

"Well, if I was you," said the downright cabman, "I wouldn't break my heart over them. I know *I'd* like to have a chance of a quiet talk with the young swells; *I'd* give them something to take home with them, I would."

Charlie said nothing, but gratefully put himself under the protection of his deliverer, who, making a considerable round to avoid the crush, led him safely to Gurley.

"There's no trap to be got for love or money, so you'll just have to walk if you want to get back to Randlebury to-night."

Anything to get away from that odious crowd. If the distance had been twice as far, Charlie would have undertaken it.

It was long enough, however, before they got away from the crowd. The road from Gurley to Sharle Bridge was alive for a mile and more with vehicles, drunken men and women, beggars and pickpockets. On either side of the road were jugglers, and thimble-riggers, and card-sharpers, who each attracted their crowd of simpletons. Many were the fights and riots that attended these eager assemblages. As they passed one booth, the headquarters of a blustering card-sharper, a sudden disturbance arose which threatened to block the entire road. The man had offered a sovereign to any one of his audience who could tell which of three cards he held uppermost in his hand. One voice called out a number. The man shuffled his cards, and by some slip on his part the guess of the speculator turned out correct. Instantly that youth demanded his sovereign, which the man refused, vowing and calling others to witness that another number had been guessed.

"I'll bring the police," cried the voice, and instantly there was a movement in the group as of some one endeavouring to force his way out.

"Knock him over!" some one cried; "he's only one of them donkey schoolboys. What business have they here at all?" And at the signal two or three of the juggler's accomplices made a dash at the retreating youth and seized him.

"Souse him in the river!" cried somebody else.

"Sit on him!" shouted a third.

In the midst of these contradictory advices the roughs lifted their struggling victim from his feet, and proceeded to carry him in the direction of the bridge.

In the momentary glimpse which Charlie got of the wretched object of this persecution, he recognised, to his horror and astonishment, Tom Drift, livid with terror, frantic with rage, and yelling with pain.

"Jim," cried Charlie, "that's Tom Drift! Oh! can't we help him? Will you try, Jim! Poor Tom!"

"Is he one of them four as brought you here?" asked Jim, not offering to move.

"Yes; but never mind that; they will drown him; see how furious they are! Will you help him, Jim?"

"Not a bit of me," replied the stubborn Jim, who was well content to see the tables turned on one who had so brutally ill-treated his young companion.

"Then I must try myself;" and so saying, the boy of thirteen rushed in among the crowd, and wildly tried to make his way to where his schoolfellow was being dragged by his persecutors.

Of course Jim had nothing for it but to back him up, and in a moment he was beside my young master.

"Let the boy be!" he shouted to those who carried Drift, in a voice so loud that for a moment the rabble stood quiet to hear.

In the midst of this silence Charlie shouted,—

"Hold on, Tom Drift, we'll help you if we can."

Instantly the crowd took up the name.

"Tom Drift! Yah! Souse Tom Drift! Roll Tom Drift in the mud! Yah! Tom Drift!"

And sure enough Tom Drift would have suffered the penalty prepared for him, despite Charlie's attempt at rescue, had not help come at that moment from a most unexpected quarter.

It will be remembered that Joe Halliday and his friend Walcot had planned a long walk on this holiday to Whitstone Woods, some ten miles beyond Gurley.

This plan they had duly carried out, and were now making the best of their way back to Randlebury along the crowded

highway, when the sudden cry of a schoolfellow's name startled them.

"Tom Drift! Yah! Beggarly schoolboy!"

"I say, Joe, that's one of our fellows! What's happening?"

Joe accosted a passer-by.

"What's going on?" he inquired.

"They're only going to souse a young chap in the river."

"What for?"

"I don't know; 'cause he don't think the same as old Shuffle, the three-card chap."

"We must do something, Joe," said Walcot.

"I wish it were any other chap; but come on, we're in for it now," said Joe.

And with that these two broad-shouldered, tall fellows dashed into the thick of the fray.

Tom's bearers were now at the bridge, which was a low one, and were turning down towards the water's edge, when a new cry arrested them.

"Now, Randlebury! Put it on, Randlebury! Who backs up Randlebury?"

It was the old familiar cry of the football field, and at the sound of the well-known voices, Charlie's heart leapt for joy.

"I do!" he shouted, with all his might. "Here you are, Randlebury!"

And Jim's gruff voice took up the cry too.

A panic set in among the blackguards. To them it seemed that the school was come in force to rescue their comrade, for on either side the cry rose, and fighting towards them they could, see at any rate two stalwart figures, who, they concluded, were but the leaders of following force. One of the men was hardy enough to turn at bay at the moment Walcot had cleared his way at last up to the front. Big bully though he was, he was no

match for the well-conditioned, active athlete who faced him, and Walcot punished him in a manner that made him glad enough to take to his heels as fast as he could.

This exploit turned the day. Dropping Tom—how and where they did not stay to consider—they followed their retreating companion with all the speed they were capable of, and left the enemy without another blow masters of the situation.

But if, as a victory, this charge of the Randlebury boys had been successful, as a rescue it had failed; for Tom Drift, being literally dropped from the shoulders of his executioners, had fallen first on to the parapet of the bridge, and then with a heavy shock into the stony stream beneath. When Walcot, Joe, Charlie, and Jim among them, went to pull him out, he was senseless. At first they thought him merely stunned by the fall (the stream was only a few inches deep), but presently when they began to lift him, they found that his right arm, on which he had fallen, was broken.

Bandaging the limb as well as they could, and bathing his forehead with water, they succeeded in restoring Tom to consciousness, and then, between them, carried him as gently as possible to the nearest house, when they managed, with some difficulty, to get a vehicle to convey them the rest of their journey. It was a sad, silent journey. To Tom, the pain caused by every jolt was excruciating. They did their best to ease him, holding him lying across their knees, while Jim drove along the level footpath; but by the time the school was reached the sufferer was again insensible, and so he remained till the surgeon had set his arm.

Thus ended the eventful holiday.

Before Charlie went to bed, the doctor sent for him to his study, and there required to know the true history of that day's doings. And Charlie told him all. I need hardly say that, according to his version, the case against the four culprits was far lighter than had their impeachment been in other hands. He took to himself whatever blame he could, and dwelt as little as possible on the plot that had been laid to get him to Gurley, and on the means which had been used to keep him when once there. He finished up with a very warm and pathetic appeal for Tom Drift.

"Don't, please, expel Tom Drift," he said, in all the boldness of generosity; "he was led on by the others, sir, and he's punished badly enough as it is. Oh! sir, if you'd seen his mother cry, when she only spoke of him, you couldn't do it."

"You must leave that to me," said the doctor sternly, "I hope I shall do nothing that is unjust or unkind. And now go to bed, and thank God for the care He has taken of you to-day."

And Charlie went.

Tom Drift was not expelled. For weeks he lay ill, and during that time no nurse was more devoted, and no companion more constant, than Charlie Newcome. A friendship sprang up between the two, strangely in contrast with the old footing on which they had stood. No longer was Tom the vain, hectoring patron, but the docile penitent, over whose spirit Charlie's character began from that time to exercise an influence which, if in the time to come it could always have worked as it did now, would have gone far to save Tom Drift from many a bitter fall and experience.

When Tom, a week before the Christmas holidays, left the sick-room and took his place once more in his class, Gus, Margetson, and Shadbolt were no longer inmates of Randlebury School.

Chapter Ten.

How I changed hands and quitted Randlebury.

And now, dear reader, we must take a leap together of three years. For remember, I am not setting myself to record the life of any one person, or the events which happened at any one place. I am writing my own life—or those parts of it which are most memorable—and therefore it behoves me not to dwell unduly on times and scenes in which I was not personally interested.

I had a very close connection with the events that rendered Charlie's first term at school so exciting, but after that, for three years, I pursued the even tenor of my way, performing some twenty-six thousand two hundred and eighty revolutions, unmarked by any incident, either in my own life or that of my master worthy of notice.

By the end of those three years, however, things were greatly changed at Randlebury. Charlie, not far from his sixteenth birthday, was now a tall, broad-shouldered fellow, lording it in the Upper Fifth, and the hero of the cricket field of which he himself had once been a cadet. In face he was not greatly

altered. Still the old curly head and bright eyes. He *was* noticed occasionally to stroke his chin abstractedly; and some envious detractors went so far as to rumour that, in the lowest recesses of his trunk he had a razor, wherewith on divers occasions, in dread secret, he operated with slashing effect. Be this as it might, Charlie was growing up. He had a fag of his own, who alternately quaked and rejoiced beneath his eye; he wore a fearful and wonderful stick-up collar on Sundays, and, above all, he treated me with a careless indifference which contrasted wonderfully with his former enthusiasm, and betokened only too significantly the advance of years on his young head.

True, he wound me up regularly; but he often left me half the day under his pillow; and though once in a fit of artistic zeal he set himself to hew out a C.N. in startling characters on my back, with the point of a bodkin, he never polished me now as he was once wont to do.

All this was painful to me, especially the operation with the bodkin, but I still rejoiced to call him master, and to know that though years had changed his looks, and sobered his childish exuberance, the same true heart still beat close to mine, and remained still as warm and guileless as when little Charlie Newcome, with me in his pocket, first put his foot forth into the world.

There were two besides myself who could bear witness at the end of these three years that time had not changed the boy's heart. These two, I need hardly say, were Tom Drift and Jim Halliday.

To Tom, Charlie had become increasingly a friend of the true kind. Ever since the day at Gurley races, the influence of the younger boy had grown and overshadowed the elder, confirming his unstable resolutions, animating his sluggish mind with worthy ambitions, and giving to his pliant character a tone coloured by his own honesty and uprightness. Just as a pilot will safely steer the ship amid shoals and rocks out into the deeper waters, so Charlie, by his quiet influence, had given Tom's life a new direction towards honour and usefulness.

Once, and once only, during those three years had he shown a disposition to hark back on his old discreditable ways, and that was the result of a casual meeting with Gus one summer during the holidays, with whom, he afterwards confessed to Charlie, he was induced to forget for a time his better resolutions in the snares of a billiard-room. But the backsliding was repented of

almost as soon as committed, and, to Charlie's anxious eyes, appeared to leave behind no bad result.

Jim was the same downright outspoken boy as ever. He had yielded, surlily at first, to the admission of Tom Drift into the confidence and friendship of himself and his chum, but by degrees, moved by Charlie's example, he had become more hearty, and now these three boys were the firmest friends in Randlebury.

One day, as Charlie was sitting in his study attempting, with many groans, to make sense out of a very obscure passage in Cicero, his fag entered and said,—

"Newcome, there's a parcel for you down at Trotter's."

"Why didn't you bring it up, you young muff?" inquired his lord.

"Because it's got to be signed for, and he wouldn't let me do that for you."

"Like your cheek to think of such a thing. What's it like?"

"Oh, it's in a little box. I say, Newcome, shall we go and get it?"

"I can't go at present; it'll wait, I suppose," said Charlie, with the air of a man who was daily in the habit of receiving little boxes by the carrier.

But for all that he could not wholly conceal his curiosity.

"What size box?" he asked presently.

"About the size of a good big pill-box."

"All that? I dare say I can fetch that up by myself," said Charlie.

Size of a large pill-box! It could not be anything so very important after all. So he turned again to his Cicero, and sent the fag about his business.

Presently, however, that youth returned with a letter for Charlie. It ran thus:

> "Dear Young Scamp,
>
> "People always say bachelor uncles are fools, and I think they are right. I've sent you a proof of my

folly in a little box, which ought to reach you about the same time as this letter. You've done nothing to deserve a present from me, and a box on the ears would be much better bestowed. Never mind. Take care of this little gift for me, in memory of the jolly Christmas you and I last spent together, and when you are not kicking up a row with your cronies at Randlebury or have nothing better to do, think of your affectionate

"Uncle Ralph."

Much to the fag's astonishment, Charlie, having perused this letter, slammed up Cicero, and seizing the cap from off his (the fag's) head, as being most ready to hand, dashed out of school in the direction of the village.

"Trot!" he exclaimed, as he reached the establishment of that familiar merchant, "hand up that little box, you old villain! Do you hear?"

The long-suffering Trotter, to whom this address was comparatively polite in its phraseology, was not long in producing the parcel, in acknowledgment of which Charlie gave his sign manual in lordly characters upon the receipt; and then, burning with impatience, yet trying hard to appear unconcerned, walked swiftly back to the school.

The fag was hanging about his study, scarcely less curious than himself.

"Hook it!" cried his master, putting the parcel down on the table and taking out his penknife to cut the string.

Still the inquisitive fag lingered. Whereupon Charlie, taking him kindly yet firmly by the collar of his coat, conveyed him to the open window, whence he gently dropped him a distance of six feet to the earth.

Privacy being thus secured, he turned again to his parcel and opened it. Imagine his delight and my agony when there came to light a splendid gold watch and chain! I turned faint with jealousy, and when a second glance showed me that the interloper was no other than the identical gold repeater whom I had known and dreaded in my infancy, I was ready to break my mainspring with vexation. To me the surprise had brought nothing but foreboding and despair, and already I felt myself discarded for my rival; but to Charlie it brought a rapture of

delight which expressed itself in a whoop which could be heard half over the school.

"What on earth's the row?" said a head looking in at the door; "caught cold, or what?"

"Come here, Jim, this moment; look at this!"

And Jim came and looked, and as he looked his eyes sparkled with admiration.

"My eye, Charlie, what a beauty!" said he, taking up the treasure in his hand. His thumb happened to touch the spring on the handle, and instantly there came a low melodious note from inside the repeater—One, two, three, and then a double tinkle twice repeated.

"That's striking," observed Jim, who was occasionally guilty of a pun. "Why, it's a repeater!"

"So it is! Did you ever know such a brick as that uncle of mine?"

"It's a pity your people can't think of anything else but watches for presents. Why, what a donkey you made of yourself about that silver turnip when you first had it! Don't you remember? What's to become of it, by the by?"

"How do I know? I say, Jim, this one wasn't got for nothing." And then the boys together investigated the wonders of the new watch, peeping at its works and making it strike, till I was quite sick of hearing it. But then I was jealous. There was no more Cicero for Charlie that day. He was almost as ridiculous, though not so rough, with his new treasure as he had been with me. He turned me out of my pocket to make room for it; and then half a dozen times a minute pulled it out and gloated over it. At night he put us both under his pillow, little dreaming of the sorrow and disappointment that filled my breast.

Where were all the old days now? Who would admire or value *me*, a poor, commonplace silver drudge, now that this grand, showy rival had come and taken my place? In my anger and excitement my heart beat fast and loud, so loud that presently I heard a voice beside me saying,—

"Gently, there, if you please; no one can hear himself speak with that noise."

"I've more right to be here than you," I growled.

"That is as our mutual master decides; but surely I have heard your voice before! Let me look at you."

And he edged himself up, so as to get a peep at my shabby face.

"To be sure—my young friend the three-guinea silver watch? How do you do, my little man?"

This patronage was intolerable, and I had no words to reply.

"Ah! you find it difficult to converse. You must indeed be almost worn out after the work you have had. I am indeed astonished to see you alive at all. I am sure, in my master's name, I may be allowed to thank you for your praiseworthy exertions in his service. We are both much obliged to you, and hope we shall show ourselves not unmindful of your—"

"Brute!" was all I could shriek, so mad was I, Whether my rival would have pursued his discourse I cannot say, but at that instant a hand came fumbling under the pillow. It passed me by, and sought the repeater, and next moment the tinkling chimes sounded half-past eleven.

It was as much as I could endure to be thus slighted and triumphed over.

"Contemptible creature!" I exclaimed; "you may think you've a fine voice, but, like a simpering schoolgirl, you can't sing till you're pressed!" I had him there, surely!

"Better that than having no voice at all, like some people, or using it when no one wants to hear it, like others." I suppose he thought he had me there, the puppy!

He went on chiming at intervals during the night, and of course my master had very little rest in consequence.

The next day Charlie and Jim had a solemn confabulation as to the disposal of me.

"It's no use wasting it, you know," said Jim. "Pity you haven't got a young brother to pass it on to."

"Suppose you take it," said the generous Charlie.

"No, old man, I don't want it. I'm not so mad about tickers as you. But, I tell you what, Charlie, you might like Tom to have it.

He's leaving, you know, and it would be a nice reminder of Randlebury."

"Just what I thought directly the new one came," exclaimed Charlie, "only then I remembered we had a row about this very watch three years ago, and I'm afraid he wouldn't like it."

"Try. Old Tom would be quite set up with a watch."

Charlie proceeded that same day in quest of Tom, whom he found packing up his books and chemicals in a large trunk.

To him my master exhibited his new treasure, greatly to Drift's delight.

"Why, Charlie," he said, "I don't know much about watches, but I'm certain that's worth twenty pounds."

"No!" exclaimed Charlie; "you don't mean that."

"Yes, I do; but, for all that, I'll back your old turnip to keep as good time as it."

"It's always gone well, the old one. I'm glad you like it, Tom."

"I always liked it, you know."

"Why?"

"Well, I've known it as long as I've known you, and if it hadn't been for it things might have been different."

"Yes," said Charlie, "it was the cause of all the row three years ago."

"And if it hadn't been for that row I should have gone to the bad long ago. That was a lucky row for me, Charlie, thanks to you."

"Don't say that, old man, because it's a cram."

"I say, Tom," added Charlie nervously, coming to his point, "will you do me a favour?"

"Anything in the world. What is it?"

"Take my old watch, Tom. It's not worth much, you know, but it may be useful, and it will help to remind you of old days. Will you, Tom?"

Tom’s lips quivered as he took me from Charlie’s outstretched hand.

“Old boy,” said he, “I’d sooner have this than anything else in the world. Somehow I feel I can’t go wrong as long as I have it.”

Charlie was beyond measure delighted to find his present accepted with so little difficulty.

“Oh, Tom,” he said, “I am glad to think you’ll have it, and I know you’ll think of me when you use it.”

“Won’t I?” said Tom. “I say, Charlie, I wish you were coming to London with me.”

“So do I. Never mind, we’ll often write, and you’ll promise to let me know how you are getting on, won’t you?”

“Yes.”

“And you’ll call and see my father pretty often, won’t you?”

“Yes.”

“And you’ll keep yourself free for a week’s jaunt at Easter?”

“Yes.”

They had much more talk that evening, which lasted till late. What they talked about it is not for me to repeat, and if it were it would probably not interest my reader. He would perhaps be disappointed to find that a considerable part of it related to a new suit of Tom’s, just arrived from the tailor’s, and that another part had reference to Tom’s intention to prevail on his landlady in London to allow him to support a bull-dog puppy on her premises. These subjects, deeply interesting to the two friends, would not improve with repetition; and neither would the rest of their talk, which was chiefly a going over of old times, and a laying of many a wondrous scheme for the future. Suffice it to say, on this last evening the two boys unbosomed themselves to one another, and if Tom Drift went off to bed in a sober and serious frame of mind, it was because he and Charlie both had thought and felt a great deal more than they had spoken during the interview. The packing went on at the same time as the talk, and then the two friends separated, only to meet once more on the morrow for a hurried farewell.

"Let's have a last look at him," said Charlie, as Tom was getting into the cab to go.

Tom took me out and handed me to him. Long and tenderly my dear young master looked at me, then, patting me gently with his hand as if I were a child, he said,—

"Good-bye, and be good to Tom Drift; do you hear?"

If a tick could express anything, my reply at that moment must have satisfied him his parting wish would not be forgotten. Then returning me to my new master, he said,—

"Good-bye, old boy; joy go with you. We'll hear of you at the head of your profession before Jim and I have left school."

"Not quite so soon," replied Tom, laughing.

Then came a last good-bye, and the cab drove off. As it turned the corner of the drive Tom leaned out of the window and held me out in his hand.

Long shall I remember that parting glimpse. He was standing on the steps with Jim waving his hands. The sun shone full on him, lighting up his bright face and curly head. I thought as I looked, "Where could one find his equal?"—*Sans peur et sans reproche*—"matchless for gentleness, honesty, and courage," and felt, as the vision faded from me, that I should never see another like him. And I never did.

Little, however, did I dream in what strange way I was next to meet Charlie Newcome.

Chapter Eleven.

How Tom Drift made one start in London, and prepared to make another.

The two months that followed my departure from Randlebury were melancholy and tedious.

It was hard for me, after the boisterous surroundings of a public school, to settle down to the heavy monotony of a dull lodging in a back street of London; and it was harder still, after being

the pride and favourite of a boy like Charlie Newcome, to find myself the property of Tom Drift.

Not that Tom used me badly at first. He wound me up regularly, and for the sake of his absent friend honoured me with a considerable share of his affection.

Indeed, for the first week or so he was quite gushing, scarcely letting me out of his sight, and sometimes even dropping a tear over me. And I, remembering Charlie's last words, "Be good to Tom Drift," felt glad to be able to remind my new master of old times, and keep fresh the hopes and resolutions with which Charlie had done so much to inspire him. But Tom Drift, I could not help feeling, was not a safe man.

There was something lacking in him, and that something was ballast. No one, perhaps, ever had a greater theoretical desire to be all that was right and good, but that was not in itself enough.

In quiet, easy times, and with a guiding friend to help him, Tom Drift did well enough; but left to himself amid currents and storms he could hardly fail to come to grief, as we shall presently see.

For the first two months he stuck hard to his work he was regular at lectures, and attentive when there; he spent his spare time well in study bearing upon the profession for which he was preparing; he wrote and heard once a week from Charlie; he kept clear of the more rackety of his fellow-students; he spent his Sundays at Mr Newcome's house, and he took plenty of healthy exercise both for body and mind.

With many examples about him of industry and success he determined to make the most of his time as a student, and spoke of the life and sphere of a country doctor, for which he was training, with the enthusiasm of one whose heart is in his work.

"The more I think of it," he once wrote to his mother, who was residing abroad for her health, "the more I take to it. A good doctor is the best-liked man in his parish. Everybody comes to him in their trouble. He gets into the best society, and yet makes himself loved by the poorest. In four or five years at least I ought to get through my course here, and then there is nothing to prevent my settling down at once. By that time I hope you'll be well enough to come and keep house for me, for all country doctors, you know, are bachelors," and so on.

All this was very well, and, as one of Tom's friends, I rejoiced to see him thus setting himself in earnest to the duties of his calling. But I rejoiced with trembling. Although he kept clear, for the most part, of his fellow-students, choosing his friends charily and shyly, I could yet see that he had no objection to contemplate from a distance the humours and festivities of his more high-spirited companions. He was not one of those impulsive fellows who shut their eyes and take a header into the midst of a new good-fellowship, only to discover too late their error, and repent their rashness at leisure.

No, Tom had his eyes open. He saw the evil as well as the good, and, alas for him, having seen it, he looked still!

The students of Saint Elizabeth's Hospital were not on the whole a bad set. On Tom's arrival in London, however, he had the firm impression in his mind that all medical students were bad characters, and this foolish notion did him much harm. If two or three of them were to go off for a spree, his imagination would at once picture them in scenes and places such as no respectable man would like to frequent, whereas, if the truth were known, these misjudged young men had committed no greater crime than that of taking a boat up the river, or a drive in a dog-cart. If a group of them should be seen by him laughing and talking, he instinctively concluded their topic must be ribaldry, whereas they would perhaps be only joking at the expense of some eccentric professor, or else chaffing one of their own number. And so it happened that Tom failed in time to distinguish between the really bad and such as he only imagined to be bad; and from his habit of looking on at them and their doings from a studied distance, their presence began gradually and insensibly to exercise a very considerable influence over his mind.

"After all," he would sometimes say to himself, "these fellows get on. They pass their exams, they pay their bills, they gain the confidence of their professors, and at the same time they manage to enjoy themselves. Perhaps I am a fool to take so much pains about the first three of these things, and to deny myself the fourth. Perhaps, after all, these fellows are not so bad as I have fancied, or perhaps I am prudish."

And then the silly fellow, having once inclined to admit there was something to be said for medical students, and having before considered all bad alike, became tolerant all round, more particularly of the really bad set, who appeared to him to enjoy themselves the most.

As his companions became more attractive to him, his work became less interesting.

"Why should I grind and plod here," he said, "while every one else is enjoying himself? If young Charlie were here, I'm pretty sure *he'd* be in for some of their sprees, and laugh at me for wearing my eyes out as I'm doing."

And then he leaned back in his chair and took to wondering what the six fellows who started that afternoon for Richmond were doing. Smashing the windows of the "Star and Garter," perhaps, or fighting the bargees on the river, or capturing a four-in-hand drag, or disporting themselves in some such genial and truly English manner. And as Tom conjured up the picture he half envied them their sport.

So he gradually became restless and discontented. The days were weary and the evenings intolerably dull. The visits to Mr Newcome were of course pleasant enough, but it was slow being cooped up an entire Sunday with two old people. On the whole, life in London was becoming stupid.

One of the first symptoms of his altered frame of mind was the occasional neglect of his regular letter to Charlie. That ever-faithful young man wrote as punctually as clockwork. Every Thursday morning a letter lay on Tom's plate at breakfast-time, addressed in the well-known hand, and bearing the Randlebury post-mark. And jolly lively letters they were.

I remembered one of them well. It came after two weeks' omission on Tom's part, and ran thus:—

> "Dear Tom,
>
> "A pretty fellow you are to correspond with! Here am I, piping to you with all my might, but I can't get you to dance. I know what you'll tell me, you old humbug—'awfully hard grind'—'exam coming on'—'lectures day and night,' and rubbish like that. All very well, but look here, Thomas, don't fancy that your diligence in cutting off legs and arms can be an excuse for cutting yours truly in this heartless manner. Not having a letter of yours to answer, I don't know how I shall scrape up material enough for a yarn. There was a big football-match on Saturday, and Jim and I were in it. You should have seen me turning somersaults, and butting my head into the fellows' stomachs. Jim and I got shoulder to

shoulder once in the game. You know old Howe? Well, he was running with the ball to wards our goal, and Jim and I were in front of him.

"I was nearest, and charged, and over I went like a ninepin; then Jim was on him, and over *he* went too. However, I was up again in time to jump on Howe's back; but he shook me off on to the ground on my nose. Then Jim, having recovered, took *his* fling, and a rare fling it was, for Howe dodged him just as he was at the top of a kangaroo leap, and left him looking very foolish in a sitting posture on the ground. However, in dodging, Howe had allowed me time to extricate my nose from the earth and make my third attempt. This time was more successful, for I got my hands round the ball; but I shouldn't have kept them there if Jim hadn't taken the opportunity of executing another astounding buck-jump, which landed him safe on his man's shoulders, where he stuck like a scared cat on the back of a somnambulist. So between us we brought our quarry to earth and gained no end of applause. Wasn't it prime?

"That's about all the news here, except that Willoughby is going to Trinity at Midsummer, and that Salter is laid up from the effects of an explosion of crackers in his trousers pockets.

"I've taken a turn at reading hard, which may astonish you. The doctor told me, if I really thought of some day arraying my manly form in a scarlet jacket and wearing a sword, I ought to put it on with my mathematics, which are not my *forte*, you know. So now I'm drawing circles and triangles at every available moment, and my logarithm tables are thumbed almost to death. Don't imagine *you're* the only burner of midnight oil.

"I had a letter from home to-day. They were saying they hadn't seen you lately. I hope you'll go up when you can; it would be a charity to the dear old folk; besides, they are very fond of you—queer taste! How's the ticker? Give it a cuff from me for not reminding you to write the last two weeks.

"The repeater goes on all serene. It has already gained some notoriety, as I was publicly requested,

> before the whole Fifth, the other day, to abstain from evoking its musical talents in the course of the Latin prose lesson. Now I must shut up. Seriously, old man, don't overwork yourself, and don't bother to write unless you've time; but you know how welcome your letters are to
>
> "Your affectionate chum,
>
> "C.N."

Of course Tom sat down and answered this letter at once, much reproaching himself for his past neglect.

With the vision of Charlie before his eyes, and with the sound of his voice again in his ears, all his old resolutions and impulses returned that morning. He worked hard, and flung the trashy novel, over which he had been wasting his time the day before, into the fire; he went off to lectures with something like his old eagerness, and discharged his duties in the wards with interest and thoroughness; he refused to allow his mind to be distracted by the proceedings of his fellow-students, and he resolved to spend that very evening at Mr Newcome's.

Tom Drift would probably have laughed at the idea that this sudden change was due entirely to Charlie's letter. To him it seemed like a spontaneous reassertion of its natural self by his mind, and a matter for such self-congratulation and satisfaction, that it at once covered the multitude of past omissions.

Indeed, Tom felt very virtuous as he returned that afternoon to his lodgings; and so felt no need to look away from self to Him who alone can keep us from falling.

He read Charlie's letter over again, and smiled at the idea of *his* getting up mathematics in his spare time.

"He's not the sort of fellow to stick to work of that sort," said Tom to himself, secretly comparing his own remarkable powers of application with those of his Randlebury friend.

Then he sat down, and more than ever admiring and wondering at his own greediness for hard work, read till it was time to start for Mr Newcome's.

It was a good long way, but being a fine evening, Tom determined to walk. He felt that after his work the fresh air would do him good, and besides, as he was in plenty of time, he

could indulge himself in that very cheap and harmless luxury, an inspection of the shop windows as he went along. He therefore selected a longer and more crowded route than perhaps he need have done, and certainly, as far as the shops went, was rewarded for his pains.

However, Tom seemed to me to have as much interest in watching the people who passed to and fro as in the shops. He amused himself by wondering where this one was going and what that one was doing. With his usual tendency, he chose to imagine they were all bent on mischief or folly, and because they happened to be in a certain street, and because in that street he had frequently heard some of his fellow-students speak of a low theatre, he jumped to the conclusion that every one he saw was bound for this place. Something impelled him to go himself and take an exterior survey of this mysterious and much-spoken-of building. He found it; and, as he expected, he found people thronging in, though not in the numbers he had anticipated. He stood and watched them for some time, and wondered what they were going to see.

He went up and read the playbill. He read the name of the play, the titles of its acts, and the names of its actors. He wondered if the man who just then drove up in a hansom was one of the heroes of the piece, or whether he was one of the performers in the farce announced to follow the play. Still the people streamed in. There was no one he knew, and no one knew him.

"Strange," thought he, "there are so many places in London where one could go and no one ever know it."

He wished he could see what the place was like inside; it must surely be crowded by this time.

Thus he dawdled for some time; then with a sigh and an effort he tore himself away and walked quickly on to the Newcomes' house. Their welcome was most cordial.

"We were afraid," said Mr Newcome, "you had quite deserted us. Come in, it is pleasant to see you. We had a letter from Charlie only to-day, telling us to see you did not overwork yourself, and to make you come up here whether you would or not. Of course we could hardly follow such instructions literally."

Tom spent a pleasant evening with the two good people.

He always had found Mr Newcome a clever and very entertaining man—a man whom one feels all the better for

talking to, and who naturally sets every guest in his house at ease. They talked much about Charlie and his prospects. They even consulted Tom as to the wisdom of yielding to the boy's desire for a military career, and Tom strongly supported the idea.

Then Tom's own prospects were canvassed and highly approved of by both Mr, and Mrs Newcome.

Tom already pictured himself settled down in his country practice, enjoying himself, doing good to others, and laying by a comfortable competency for future years. On the whole, he felt, as he quitted the hospitable roof of his genial friends, that he had rarely spent a more pleasant or profitable evening.

People were thronging out of the theatre as he returned, and he could not resist the desire to stand and watch them; for a little. He wondered what they had seen, and whether those he saw had waited for the "farce," or was that still going on?—and he wondered if any people ever went into a theatre at so late an hour as eleven.

Ah, Tom! he did not go in that night, or the next, but he was getting himself ready for the first step.

Reader, do not mistake Tom's weakness and folly. He was not trying to persuade himself this place was a good one for him to enter; he was not thoughtlessly going in to discover too late that he had better have stayed out. No, Tom—rightly or wrongly—had made up his own mind that this theatre was a bad place, and *yet* he had a desire to enter in!

Chapter Twelve.

How Tom Drift begins to go downhill.

Time went on, and Tom Drift advanced inch by inch nearer the brink. He slipped, not without many an effort to recover himself, many a pang of self-reproach, many a vague hope of deliverance.

"Be good to Tom Drift!" was ever ringing in my ears. But what could I do? He often neglected me for days. All I could do was to watch and tremble for what was coming.

You who are so ready to call Tom a fool, and hug yourselves that you have more strength of character and resolution than he had, try to realise what were his perils and what were his temptations at that time, before you pass judgment.

The dulness of those lodgings in Grime Street was often almost unbearable. When his work was done, and Tom looked out of the window and saw nothing but carts and cabs and tradesmen, and the dismal houses opposite, what wonder if he sometimes felt miserable? When he heard nothing but pattering footsteps down the pavement, the rumble of wheels and the street cries under his window, what wonder if he felt lonely and friendless? No footsteps stopped at *his* door, no friendly face lightened *his* dull study, no cheery laughter brought music to *his* life. What wonder, I say, if he moped and felt discontented?

What wonder if his thoughts wandered to scenes and places that contrasted forcibly with his dead-alive occupation? What wonder if he hankered after a "little excitement," to break the monotony of lectures, hard reading, and stupid evenings?

"Ah," I hear you say, "there are plenty of things he might have done. It was his own fault if he was dull in London. I would have gone to the museums, the libraries, the concerts, the parks, the river, the picture galleries, and other harmless and delightful places of amusement. Why, I could not be dull in London if I tried. Tom Drift was an idiot."

My dear friend, what a pity Tom Drift had not the advantage of your acquaintance when he was in London! But he had not. He had no friends, as I have said, except the Newcomes, whom he only visited occasionally, and as a matter chiefly of duty, and his anxiety to keep right at first had led him to reject and fight shy of friendships with his fellow-students. Doubtless it was his own fault to a large extent that he allowed himself to get into this dull, dissatisfied condition. If he had had a healthy mind like you, friend, it would not have happened. But instead of utterly scouting him as an idiot, rather thank God you have been spared all his weaknesses and all his temptations.

Was Tom never to learn that there was a way—"The Way, the Truth, and the Life"—better than any he had yet tried, which would lead him straight through the tangled mazes of his London life? Was he never to discover that Friend, truer than all earthly friends, at Whose side he might brave each trial and overcome each temptation?

Poor Tom! he walked in a way of his own? and trusted in no one better than himself; and that was why he fell.

As I have said, he did not fall without an effort. I have known him one day buy a bad, trashy book, and the same evening, in a fit of repentance—for God's Spirit wonderfully strives with men—take and burn it to ashes in his grate. But I have also known him to buy the same book again the next day. I have known him to walk a mile out of his way to avoid a place of temptation; and yet, before his walk was done, find himself, after all, under the glare of its lamps. The moth hovers in wide circles round the candle before it ventures its wings in the flame. And so it was with Tom; but the catastrophe came at last.

One evening about three weeks before the time fixed for the Easter trip with Charlie, Tom felt in tolerably dull. He had been neglecting his work during several days for novels of the lowest and most sensational type. Over these he had dawdled till his brain had become muddled with their unreal incidents and impure suggestions, and now that they were done he felt fit for nothing. He could not settle down to work, he had no friends to turn to, and so he put his hat on his head and sallied out into the streets to seek there the variety he could not find indoors.

As usual, his steps led him to the low theatre about which he was so curious, and of which he heard so much from his fellow-students. It was half-past seven, and people were beginning to crowd round the door, waiting for it to open. Tom, standing on the other side of the pavement, watched them with a painful fascination.

"Shall I go for once?" he asked himself. Then he strolled up to the playbill and read it.

As he was doing so some one slapped him on the shoulder, and, turning quickly round, he found himself face to face with his old acquaintance Gus Burke and another youth.

Gus, who was still small of stature, though fully nineteen years of age, was arrayed in the height of the fashion. As Tom regarded him he felt his own coat become more shabby and his hat older, and he wished he had brought his dogskin gloves and cane. Gus was smoking, too, a cigarette, and very distinguished and gentlemanly Tom thought it looked. He felt, as he regarded his brilliant and unexpected acquaintance, that he was rather glad those people who were standing at the theatre door should see him accosted in so familiar a way by such a hero. And Gus's

friend was no less imposing—more so, indeed, for he wore an eyeglass.

Tom was so astonished at this unexpected meeting that he had noticed all this long before he found words to return his old schoolfellow's salutation.

Gus, however, relieved him of his embarrassment.

"Tom Drift, upon my honour! How are you, old horse, and how's your mother? Who'd have thought of running up against you like this?"

Tom tried to look as much at his ease as he could as he replied,—

"Why, Gus, old man, where *did* you spring from? I didn't know you were in London."

"Ain't I, though!" replied Gus, tapping the end of his cigarette on his cane. "But what are you up to, Tom?—you're not going in here, are you?" pointing over his shoulder to the theatre.

"Well, no," said Tom; "that is," added he, with as much of a swagger as he could assume on the spur of the moment, "I had been half thinking of just seeing what it was like. Some of our fellows, you know, fancy the place."

How suddenly and easily he was, under the eyes of these two "swells," casting off the few slender cords that still held him moored to the shore.

"Oh, don't go in there," said Gus, with a look of disgust; "it's the slowest place in London—nothing on but that old fool Shakespeare's plays, or somebody's equally stupid. You come along with us, Tom, we'll take you to a place where you'll get your money's worth and no mistake. Won't we, Jack?"

The youth appealed to as Jack answered with a most affected drawl, and with an effort which appeared to cause him no little fatigue, "Wathah."

"Come along," said Gus, lighting a fresh cigarette.

Tom was uncomfortable. He would not for worlds seem unwilling to go, and yet he wished he could get out of it somehow.

"Very kind of you," he said, "I'd like it awfully; but I must get back to do some work, you know, I've an exam coming on. It's an awful nuisance!"

"Why, I thought you were going in here, in any case!" said Gus.

"Ah—well—yes, so I was, just for a little, to see what sort of affair it was; but I meant to be home by nine."

"Well, just have a squint in at our place; and if you must go, you must. Come along, old man; cut work for one evening, can't you? You've become an awfully reformed character all of a sudden; you usen't to be so hot on your books."

Tom had no ambition before these two to figure in the light of a reformed character, and he therefore abandoned further protest, and proceeded to accompany Gus and his friend down the street.

"Have a weed?" asked Gus.

"Thanks, I hardly ever smoke," said Tom.

"They're very mild," said Gus, with a sneer.

Tom took the proffered cigar without another word, and did his best first to light and then to smoke it as if he were an experienced smoker.

"Who's your fwend?" inquired Gus's languid acquaintance.

"By the way," said that young man, "I've never introduced you two. Mortimer, allow me to introduce you to my friend Tom Drift."

Mr Mortimer gave a nod which Tom felt he would like greatly to have at his command, there was something so very knowing and familiar about it.

"It was Tom got up that little race party I was telling you of, Jack, you know. He's a regular sporting card. By the way, what's become of that little mooney-face prig we took with us that day; eh, Tom?"

Tom was out in midstream now, floating fast out to sea.

"Who—oh, young Newcome?" said he; "he's still at Randlebury."

"Young puppy! You never knew such a spree as that was, Jack," said Gus; and then he launched forth into a highly-spiced account of the eventful expedition to Gurley races, contriving to represent Tom as the hero of the day, greatly to that youth's discomfort and confusion, and no less to the amusement of Mr Mortimer.

"Here we are at last," said Gus, as the trio arrived at a gorgeously illuminated and decorated restaurant.

Tom's heart sunk within him. More than ever did he wish himself back in his dull lodgings, never again to set foot abroad, if only he could have got out of this fix. But there was no drawing back.

"Shall we go in yet, or knock the balls about for a bit?" said Gus. "This fellow Tom's a regular swell at billiards. Do you remember thrashing me last time we met, Tom—the summer after I'd left Randlebury?"

Tom could not deny he had beaten Gus on the occasion referred to, and felt it was useless for him to protest—what was the case—that he was only a very indifferent player. He agreed to the idea of a game, however, as he hoped he might at its close be able to make his escape without accompanying his two companions to the music-hall attached to the restaurant, and which he already knew by reputation as one of the lowest entertainments in London. "You two play," said Gus, "and I'll mark. You'll have to give Jack points, Tom, you know, you're such a dab."

It was vain for Tom to disclaim the distinction, and the game began.

"Hold hard!" said Gus, after the first stroke; "what are you playing for?"

"Weally, I don't know; thillingth, I thuppothe," lisped Mr Mortimer.

"All serene! Go on."

And they went on, and Mr Mortimer made no end of misses, so that, in spite of the points he had received, Tom beat him easily. In the two games which followed the same success attended him, and he won all the stakes.

"Didn't I tell you he was a swell?" said Gus. "Upon my word, Tom, I don't know how you do it!"

"It's just the sort of table I like to play on," said Tom, elated with his success, and unwilling to own that half his lucky shots had been "flukes."

"I tell you what," said Gus; "you owe me my revenge, you know, from last time. I'll play you to-morrow for half-crowns, if you'll give me the same points as you did to Jack."

Tom was fast nearing the breakers now. He had nothing for it but to accept the challenge, and the table was consequently engaged for the next evening.

"I must be off now, you fellows!" he said.

"Nonsense! Why, you haven't yet seen the fun below. You must stay for that."

"I wish I could," faltered Tom; "but I really must do some reading to-night."

"So you can; the thing only lasts an hour, and you're not obliged to go to bed at eleven, are you?"

Still Tom hesitated.

"You don't mean to say you are squeamish about it?" said Gus, in astonishment. "I could fancy that young friend of your mother's turning up *his* eyes at it, but a fellow like you wouldn't be so particular, I reckon; eh, Jack?"

And Mr John Mortimer, thus appealed to, laughed an amused laugh at the bare notion.

That laugh and the term, "a fellow like you," destroyed the last of Tom's wavering objections, and he yielded.

Chapter Thirteen.

How Tom Drift, still going downhill, met my old master.

When Tom reached his lodgings that night he found a jubilant letter from Charlie awaiting him.

"Just fancy," he said, "it's only three weeks more, old man, and then to Jericho with books, and test-tubes, and anatomy! I'll drag you out of your study by the scruff of your neck, see if I don't; I'll clap a knapsack on your back, and haul you by sheer force down into Kent. There you shall snuff the ozone, and hold your hat on your head with both hands on the cliff top. I'll hound you through old castles, and worry you up hills. If I catch so much as a leaflet on chemistry in your hands, I'll tear it up and send it flying after the sea-gulls. In short, I shouldn't like to say what I won't do, I'm so wild at the prospect of a week with you. Of course, the dear old people growl at me for leaving them in the lurch; but they are glad for us to get the blow; indeed, my pater insists on paying the piper, which is handsome of him. I expect I shall get a day in London on my way, either going or returning; and if you can put me up at your diggings for the night, we'll have a jolly evening, and you can show me all your haunts."

Tom gasped as he got so far; and well he might.

"I'll tell you all the news when I come. I suppose, by your not writing, you are saving yours up for me. Ta, ta, old boy, and *au revoir* in twenty-one days! Hurrah! Yours ever,—C.N."

Tom, in his misery, crushed the letter up in his fingers and flung it from him. If a passing pang shot through his breast, it was followed almost instantly by other feelings of vexation and shame. One moment he was ready to sink to the floor in a passion of penitence and remorse—the next, he was ready to resent Charlie's influence over him even at a distance, and to sneer, as Gus and his friend had done, at the boy's expense. His brain was too muddled with the excitement and the strange emotions of that evening to reason with himself; his head ached, and his mind was poisoned.

"What right has the fellow always to be following me up in this way?" he asked. "I'm a fool to stand it. Why can't I do as I choose without his pulling a long face?"

Thus Tom questioned, and thus he proved that it was Charlie's influence more than his letter that worried him; for what had the latter said, either in the way of exhortation or reproof?

Then he threw himself on the bed, and lay with the wild memory of the evening crowding on his feverish mind. He rose, and, lighting a candle, endeavoured to read; but even his novel was flat and stupid, and in the midst of it he fell asleep, to dream of Gus and his friend all night long. Long ere he awoke

my senses had left me, for he had neglected to wind me up. Next morning he went to lectures as usual. To his fellow-students he appeared the same shy, quiet youth he had always seemed; to Mr

Newcome, whom he met in the street, he appeared still as Charlie's chosen and dear friend, ready for his holiday and rejoicing in the prospect of the coming meeting; to his professors he appeared still the same steady, hard-working student, bent on making his way in his profession. But to himself, alas! how altered, how degraded he appeared!

In the midst of his duties his thoughts ran continually—now back to the strange experience of last evening, now forward to the doubtful events of this.

The recollection of the past had lost a good deal of its repulsiveness after twelve hours' interval, and although he still felt it to be low and harmful, he yet secretly encouraged his curiosity to revisit the place of his temptation.

"After all, it did me no harm," said he to himself; "it's not interfered with my work, or made me feel worse than before. What harm in going again to-night? When Charlie comes, and we get away from town, I shall easily be able to break it off; and besides, Charlie's sure to help to put me square; he always does. Yes; I think I'll just go and see what's on there to-night; it can't be worse than it was. Besides," thought he, glad to seize on any straw of excuse, "I'm bound in honour to play Gus a return match; it would be ungentlemanly to back out of that."

But why sicken you, dear reader, and myself, with recapitulating the sad workings of this poor fellow's mind? The more he tried to convince himself he was doing only a slight wrong, the more his conscience cried out he was running to his ruin. But he stopped his ears and shut his eyes, and blindly dared his fate. He went that evening to the music-hall. He met Gus and Mortimer, and two other friends. He had taken care to get himself up in a nearer approach to his companions' style. He bought some cigars of his own on the way, and offered them with a less awkward swagger than he had been able to assume the night before. He found himself able to nod familiarly to the barmaid, and fancied that even Mortimer must have approved of the way in which he ordered about the billiard-marker.

In the match with Gus for half-crowns he lost, though only narrowly—so narrowly that he was not content, without a further trial of skill, to own himself beaten, and therefore

challenged his adversary to a second meeting the next evening. Then he watched the others play, and betted with Mortimer on the result—and alas! for him, he won.

It was Tom himself who said, at nine o'clock,—

"And now, suppose we see what's going on below."

It was the same stupid, disgusting spectacle, but to Tom it seemed less repulsive than he had found it the night before. True, he at times felt a return of the old feeling of shame; the blush would occasionally suffuse his face; but such fits were rare, and he was able to carry them off more easily with joke and laughter.

"Jack," said Gus in a whisper to Mortimer, as Tom, after accepting a very broad hint to treat the party to spirits, was turning to go, "that fellow will be a credit to you and me. Did you see how he smacked his lips over the play, and yet all the while wanted to make us think he saw that sort of thing every day of his life, eh? He's a promising chap, eh, Jack?"

"Wathah," replied Jack, laughing.

Meanwhile Tom, glad enough to get out into the pure air, though in not so desperate a case as the night before, shouldered his way among the loitering company towards the door. He was just emerging into the street, when the sound of voices arrested him.

"That's one of our men, isn't it?" said one.

"Why, so it is; I fancied he was anything but a festive blade. Yes; and upon my word he's half seas over!"

Tom had no difficulty in discovering that these hurried words had reference to him, and turning instinctively towards the voices, he found himself face to face with two, reputedly, of the wildest of his fellow-students.

Gladly would he have avoided them; gladly would he have shrunk back and lost himself in the crowd, but it was too late now; he stood discovered.

"How are you?" cried one of the two, as he passed; "isn't your name Drift?"

Tom stared as if he would have denied his name; but the next moment he put on his lately acquired swagger, and said, "Yes."

"Ah! I thought so; one of the Saint Elizabeth men. Hullo! he's in a hurry, though," added he, as Tom made a dive forward and strode rapidly down the street.

It was but a step deeper. Well he knew that by to-morrow every one of his fellow-students would know of him as a frequenter of that wretched place. Well he knew that, as far as they were concerned, the mask of shyness and reticence under which he had sheltered in their midst was for ever pulled away. "One of us," indeed! So truly the very worst of them might now speak and think of him. Oh, if he had but considered in time; if he had but stemmed this flood at its source! But it was too late now.

And he strode home reckless and hardened.

The next day, as he expected, every one seemed to know of his visits to the music-hall. The two who had seen him accosted him with every show of friendship and intelligence. He was appealed to in the presence of nearly a dozen of his fellow-students as to the name of one of the low songs there given; he was asked if he was going to be there to-night, and he was invited to join this party and that in similar expeditions to similar places. And to all these questions and greetings he was constrained to reply in keeping with his assumed character of a gay spark. How sick, how vile he felt; yet in that one day how hardened and desperate he became!

It was not in Tom Drift to cry "I have sinned! I will return!" No, once loose from his moorings, he let himself float down the stream, watching the receding banks in mute despair, raising no shout for succour, venturing no plunge for safety.

You, who by this time have given him up, disgusted at his weakness, his vanity, his low instincts, his cowardliness—who say let him wallow in the mire he has prepared for himself, who know so glibly what you would have done, what you would have said, what you would have felt, remember once more that Tom Drift was not such as you; and unfortunately did not know you. He was not gifted with your heroic resolution or your all-penetrating wisdom. He was an ordinary sinful being of flesh and blood, relying only on his own poor strength; and therefore, reader, try to realise all he went through before you fling your stone.

The toils were closing round him fast. His will had been the first to suffer, his conscience next. Then with a rush had gone honour, temperance, and purity; and now finally the flimsy rag, his good name, had been torn from him, and he stood revealed a prodigal—and a hypocrite.

Even yet, however, help might have been forthcoming.

"I say, you fellow," said one of his fellow-students this same day, "I've never spoken to you before, and perhaps shall never do so again; but *don't be a fool*!"

"What do you mean?" said Tom sharply.

"Only this, and I can't help it if you are angry, keep clear of these new friends of yours, and still more, keep clear of the places they visit. If you've been led in once, rather cut off your right hand than be led in again, that's all!"

What spirit of infatuation possessed Tom Drift, that he did not spring for very life at the proffered help, that he did not besiege this friend, however blunt and outspoken, and compel his timely aid? Alas, for his blindness and folly!

Scowling round at the speaker, he muttered an oath, and said, "What on earth concern is it of yours who my friends are and where I go? Mind your own business."

And so, thrusting rudely away the hand that might, by God's grace, have saved him, he swept farther and farther out towards the dark waters.

One final and great hope was still reserved for him, and that was Charlie's visit. But to Tom that prospect was becoming day by day mere distasteful. As the days wore on, and Tom sunk deeper and deeper into the snare prepared for him, the thought of a week in the society of one so upright and pure as Charlie became positively odious. The effort to conceal his new condition would be almost impossible, and yet to admit it to him would be, he felt, to shatter for ever the only friendship he really prized. He racked his brain for expedients and excuses to avert the visit, but without avail. If he pleaded illness Charlie would be the first to rush to his bedside; if he pleaded hard work Charlie would insist on sharing it, or improving its few intervals of rest; if he pleaded disinclination Charlie would devise a hundred other plans to please him. In short, Charlie's visit was inevitable, and as he looked forward to it he writhed in misgiving and anxiety.

His visits to the music-hall were meanwhile continuing, and his circle of acquaintance at that evil haunt enlarging. He was duly installed as one of the "fast set" at Saint Elizabeth's, and under its auspices had already made his *début* at other scenes and places than that of his first transgression. He was known by sight to a score of billiard-markers, potmen, blacklegs, and lower characters still, and was on nodding terms with fully half of them. He had lost considerably more than he had gained at billiards, and was still further emptying his purse at cards. Quick work for a few weeks! So quickly and fatally, alas! Will the infection, once admitted, spread, especially in a patient whose moral constitution has undergone so long a course of slow preparation as Tom's had.

The day came at last. Tom had carefully hidden away his worst books and his spirits; he had bathed his face half a dozen times, to remove the traces of last night's intemperance he had gathered together from the corners where they had for so long lain neglected the books and relics of his Randlebury days, and restored them to their old places; he had brightened me up, and he had taken pains to purify his room from the smell of rank tobacco; and then he sauntered down to the station.

How my heart beat as the train came into the platform! *His* head was out of the window, and *his* hand was waving to us a hundred yards off; and the next minute he had burst from the carriage, and seized Tom by the hands.

"How are you, old Tom? I thought we'd never get here; how glad I am to set eyes on you! Isn't this a spree?" And not waiting for Tom's answer he hauled his traps out of the carriage in a transport of delight.

Still the same jovial, honest, fine-hearted boy.

"Hi! here! some of you," he shouted to a porter, "look after these things, will you, and get us a cab. I tell you what, Tom, you've got to come up home with me first, and we can have dinner there; then I'll come on to your den, and we can pack our knapsacks and sleep, and then start by the five train to-morrow morning."

Thus he bustled, and thus he brought back the old times on poor Tom Drift. Without the heart to speak, he helped his friend to collect his luggage, and when they were fairly started in the cab he even smiled feebly in reply to the boy's sallies.

"Tom, you rascal, didn't I tell you you weren't to knock yourself up, eh? Why can't you do what you're told? Why, I declare you're as thin as a hurdle, and as black under the eyes as if you had been fighting with a collier. You ought to be ashamed of yourself! Look at me; do all I can I can't get up an interesting pallor like you, and I've fretted enough over those conic sections (comic sections Jim always calls them). Never mind! Wait till I get you down to the sea."

And so he rattled on, while Tom leaned back in his seat and winced at every word.

When they reached Mr Newcome's of course there was a scene of eager welcome on one side and boisterous glee on the other. Tom, as he looked on, sighed, as well he might, and wished he could have been spared the torture of this day.

Charlie tore himself away from his mother, to drag his friend into the house.

"Look at this object!" he cried; "did you ever see such a caution to students? If we do nothing else in Kent we shall scare the crows, eh, Tom?"

"Charlie!" exclaimed his mother; "you have come home quite rude! I hope you'll excuse him, Mr Drift."

Mr Drift said nothing, and looked and felt extremely miserable.

"He looks really ill, poor fellow!" said Mrs Newcome to her husband. "I wonder they allow the students to overwork themselves in that way."

And then they sat down to dinner—a meal as distasteful to Tom as it was joyful to Charlie and his parents.

Chapter Fourteen.

How Tom Drift parted with his best friend.

Charlie could not fail to discover before long that there was something wrong with my master.

Never before had he known him so silent, so spiritless, so mysterious. No effort could rouse him into cheerfulness or

conversation, and for the first time for three years Charlie felt that Tom was sorry to see him. Naturally, he put it all down to the results of overwork. Tom in his letters had always represented himself as engrossed in study. Even the few hurried scrawls of the past few weeks he had excused on the same ground. It never once occurred to the simple-minded schoolboy that a chum of his could possibly be struggling in the agonies of shame and temptation and he know nothing of it; he who knew so little of evil himself, was not the one to think or imagine evil where any other explanation was possible.

And yet Tom's manner was so strange and altered, that he determined, as soon as they should find themselves alone, to make an effort to ascertain its cause.

The opportunity came when the two youths, having bid farewell to Mr and Mrs Newcome, found themselves at last in Tom's lodgings in Grime Street.

"Well," said Charlie, with all the show of cheerfulness he could muster, for his spirits had been strangely damped by the irresponsive gloom of his old schoolfellow—"well! here's the den at last. Upon my word, old man, I've seen livelier holes! Why don't you explore and find some place a trifle less dead-alive? But I dare say it's convenient to be near the Hospital, and when a fellow's working, it doesn't much matter what sort of a place he's in, as long as there's not a row going on under his window—and I don't suppose there's much chance of that here," said Charlie, looking out into the black street with a kind of shudder.

Tom said nothing; he wished his friend would not everlastingly be talking of hard work and study in the way he did. However Charlie intended it, it was neither more nor less than a talking at him, and that he could not stand.

Charlie took no notice of his silence, but continued his inspection of the dismal apartment, lighting up with pleasure at the sight of the old Randlebury relics.

"My old rod!" exclaimed he, taking down the very rod with the lance-wood top which had figured so conspicuously in a certain adventure three years ago; "how jolly to see it again! I'm afraid you don't get much use for it here. And our fencing-sticks, too; see, Tom, here's the very place where you got under my guard and snipped a bit out of the basket. Ha, ha! what a crack that was! And here's the picture of old Randlebury, with you at your window, and me lying on the grass (and looking uncommonly

like a recently felled tree). Look here, Tom, this window here is where Jim and I hang out now. It used to be Callaghan's. By the way, do you ever see Call? He's in London, articled to a solicitor. A pretty lawyer he'll make! Have you seen him yet, Tom?"

Tom, during this rattle, had been looking listlessly out of the window. He now turned round with a start and said—

"Eh? what did you say?"

The look which accompanied the words was so haggard and miserable, that Charlie's pity was instantly touched. He stepped across the room and put his arm in Tom's as he stood, and said,—

"Tom, old boy, what's wrong?"

Tom said nothing, but walked away and leaned against the mantelpiece.

"What is it, Tom? Are you ill, or in trouble? You'll tell me, won't you?"

Tom still remained silent, but his flushing face and restless lips showed that the appeal had at least been heard.

"Old boy," continued Charlie, venturing again nearer, "we never used to have secrets. I'm sure something's the matter. Mayn't I know what it is? Very likely I can't help you; but I could try."

Tom's lips quivered. The old influence was fast coming back. Already in his mind he was picturing himself telling Charlie all and with his help extricating himself from the slough into which he had sunk. How *could* he stand unmoved with that voice, familiar by many a memory of simple courageous goodness, again falling on his ear; and that appealing face, one so loved and delighted in, again turned to his?

"I'm afraid it's something more than ill health, old boy. You've something on your mind. Oh! why won't you at least tell me what it is?"

Tom could stand it no longer. He *must* speak. Whatever the confession cost him, whatever its effect would be on his old schoolfellow's friendship, Charlie must know all. To him at least he could not play the hypocrite or the deceiver. He had turned from the mantelpiece, his hand was held out to take that of his

friend's, he was just about to speak, when the door of his room opened, and there entered Gus, Mortimer, and two companions.

"Here he is!" cried Gus, not noticing that Tom had company. "Tommy, old man, you're in luck. Old Owl has got a supper on to-night, no end of punch, my boy, and he's expecting you; and afterwards we're going for a regular night of it to the— Hullo! who's your friend?"

He caught sight of Charlie at this moment, and for an instant failed to recognise in Tom's companion the boy whom he had treated so shamefully at Gurley races. But he remembered him in a moment.

"What, surely—yet upon my honour so it is, our young sporting friend. How are you, Charlie, my boy? Here's a game! You'll come too, of course? Mortimer, this fellow is Drift's special—up to all the wrinkles, no end of a knowing blade."

During this brief and rapid salutation Tom and Charlie, I need hardly say, were speechless. One in utter despair, the other in utter rage and astonishment. In both the revulsion of feeling caused by the interruption was almost stupefying, and they stood for a moment staring at the intruders in simple bewilderment.

Tom was the first to find words. His cheeks were white, and his voice almost choked as he said to Gus,—

"I wish you'd go. I'm engaged."

"So you are," said Gus, with a sneer; "but I say. Tom, old man, I wish you'd come. It's too good a thing to miss."

"Go away!" almost gasped Tom.

"Oh, of course an Englishman's house is his castle," said Gus, offended at this unusual rebuff; "you're a fool, though, that's all. We were going to have a spree to-night that would make all sprees of the past month look foolish. Come along, don't be an ass; and bring young mooney-face; I dare say by this time he knows what's what as well as you or me, Tom; eh, Jack?"

"Lookth tho," replied the amused Jack.

By this time Charlie had found words. The truth of course had all flashed in upon him; he knew the secret now of Tom's

strange manner, of the neglected letters, of the haggard looks, of the reluctant welcome.

And he knew, too, that but for this untimely incursion he would have heard it all from Tom himself, penitent and humble, instead of, as now, hardened and desperate.

And he recognised in the miserable little swaggering dandy before him the author and the promoter of his friend's ruin; on him therefore his sudden rage expended itself.

"You little cowardly wretch!" he exclaimed, addressing Gus, "haven't you done mischief enough to Tom already? Go out of his room!"

Poor Charlie! Nothing could have been more fatal to his hopes than this rash outbreak. The words had scarcely escaped his lips before he saw the mischief he had done.

Tom's manner suddenly altered. All signs of shame and penitence disappeared as he stepped with a swagger up to Charlie and exclaimed,—

"What business have you to attack my friends? Get out yourself!"

"Bravo, Tom, old man," cried the delighted Gus. "Do you hear, young prig? walk off, you're not wanted here."

Charlie stood for one moment stunned and irresolute. Had there been in Tom's face the faintest glimmer of regret, or the faintest trace of the old affection, he would have stayed and braved all consequences. But there was neither. The spell that bound Tom Drift, his fear of being thought a milksop, had changed him utterly, and as Charlie's eyes turned with pleading look to his they met only with menace and confusion.

"Go!" repeated Tom, driven nearly wild by the mocking laugh in which Mortimer and his two companions joined.

This, then, was the end of their friendship—so full of hope on one side, so full of promise on the other.

It was a strange moment in the lives of those two. To one it was the wilful throwing away of the last and best chance of deliverance, to the other it was the cruel extinction of a love and trust that had till now bid fair to stand the wear of years to come.

"Get out, I say!" said Tom Drift, once more goaded to madness by the pitying sneers of Mortimer.

Charlie stayed no longer. Half stunned, and scarcely knowing what he did, with one wild, mute prayer at his heart, he turned without a word and left the room.

Tom's friends followed his departure with mocking laughter, and watched his slowly retreating figure down the street with many a foul jest, and then returned to congratulate Tom Drift on his deliverance.

"Well," said Gus, "you are well rid of *him*, at any rate. What a lucky thing we turned up just when we did! He'd have snivelled you into a shocking condition. Why, what a weak-minded fellow Tom is; ain't he, Jack?"

"Wathah," replied Jack, with a laugh.

Meanwhile Tom had abandoned even himself. He hated his friends, he hated himself, he hated Charlie and cursed himself for having ever allowed him within his doors. He took no notice of Gus's gibes for a long time. At last, "Ugh!" said he, "never mind if I'm weak-minded or not, I'm sick of all this. Suppose we go off to the supper, and I'll stand treat afterwards at the music-hall?"

And crushing his hat on his head, he dashed out of the house utterly reckless and desperate.

Need I say my thoughts were with the poor injured boy, who, stung with ingratitude, robbed of his friend, and ill with mingled pity, dread, and sorrow, walked slowly down the street away from Tom's lodgings? Ah! when should I see his face or hear his voice again now?

At the supper that evening Tom drank often and deeply, and of all the party his shout rose highest and his laugh drowned all the others. They led him staggering away among them, and brought him to their vile resort. Even his companions wondered at his reckless demeanour, and expostulated with him on his extravagant wildness. He laughed them to scorn and called for more drink. After a while they rose to depart, leaving him where he was, noisy and helpless.

How long he remained so I cannot say, for suddenly and most unexpectedly I found myself called upon to enter upon a new stage in my career.

As my master leaned back hopelessly tipsy in his seat, a hand quietly and swiftly slipped under his coat and drew me from my pocket; as swiftly the chain was detached from its button-hole, and the next thing I was conscious of was being thrust into a strange pocket, belonging to some one who was quitting the hall as fast as his legs would carry him.

Chapter Fifteen.

How I found myself in very low company.

My capturer was a boy, and as remarkable a specimen of a boy as it has ever been my lot to meet during the whole of my career. His age was, say, fourteen. He stood four feet one in his slipshod boots.

The hat which adorned his head was an old white billycock, which in its palmy days might have adorned noble brows, so fashionable were its pretensions. Now, alas! it had one side caved in, and the other was green with wear and weather. The coat which arrayed his manly form was evidently one not made recently or to wearer's measure, for besides showing cracks and rents in various parts, its tails were so extravagantly long for its small occupant that they literally almost touched the ground. His nether garments, on the other hand, although they resembled the coat in their conveniences for ventilation, being all in rags and tatters, appeared to have been borrowed from a smaller pair of legs even than those owned by my present possessor, for they—at least one leg—barely reached half way below the knee, while the other stopped short very little lower. Altogether, the boy was as nondescript and "scarecrowy" an object as one could well expect to meet with.

As he left the hall he gave a quick look round to assure himself no one was following him; then he darted across the road and proceeded to shuffle forward in so extremely leisurely and casual a way, that very few of the people who met him would have imagined he carried a stolen watch in his pocket.

Such a hole as it was! As soon as I had sufficiently recovered from my astonishment to look about me, I became aware that I was by no means the sole occupant of the receptacle he was pleased to designate by the title of a pocket, but which other people would have called a slit in the lining of his one sound coat-tail.

There was a stump of a clay pipe, with tobacco still hot in it. There was a greasy piece of string, a crust of bread, a halfpenny, a few brass buttons, and a very greasy and very crumpled and very filthy copy of a "penny awful" paper. I need hardly say that this scrutiny did not afford me absolute pleasure. In the first place, my temporary lodging was most unsavoury and unclean; and in the second place, there was not one among my many fellow-lodgers who could be said to be in my position in life, or to whom I felt in any way tempted to address any inquiry.

This difficulty, however, was settled for me. A voice close beside me said, in a hoarse whisper, "What cheer, Turnip? how do you like it?"

I looked round, and perceived that the speaker was the clay pipe, who happened to be close beside me as I lay.

I held my nose—so to speak (for watches are not supposed to be gifted with that organ)—the tobacco which was smouldering in him must have been a month old, while the pipe itself looked remarkably grimy and dirty. However, thought I, there would be no use in being uncivil to my new comrades, unpleasant though they were, and I might as well make use of this pipe to assist me to certain information I was curious to get. So I answered, "I don't like it at all. Can you tell me where I am?"

"Where are you, Turnip? Why, you're in young Cadger's pocket, to be sure; but you won't stay there long, no error."

I secretly wished this objectionable pipe would not insist on addressing me as "Turnip," but on the whole the present did not seem exactly the time to stand on my dignity, so I replied,—

"Why, what's going to become of me?"

"What's going to become of you, Turnip! Why, you'll go to Cadger's uncle. Won't he, mate?"

The mate addressed was the piece of string, who, I should say, was by no means the latest addition to the Cadger's collection of valuables. He now grinned and wriggled in reply to the pipe's appeal, and snuffled,—

"That's right, mate; that's where he'll go. Do you hear, Turnip? that's where you'll go—to Cadger's uncle."

It occurred to me that Cadger's uncle would have to be vastly more respectable and fragrant than his nephew to make the change at all advantageous to me.

"Is young Cadger a thief?" I next inquired.

The pipe laughed.

"Why, what a funny chap you are, Turnip!" it said.

"Does it look like it? Cadger a thief!—oh, my eye! not at all. Eh, mate?"

The greasy string took up the laugh, and snivelled in chorus.

"Ho, ho! ain't he a funny chap? Do you hear. Turnip? ain't you a funny chap? Oh, my eye! not at all."

It was disgusting! Not only was I cooped up in an abominably filthy tail-coat pocket, with a motley rabble of disreputable associates, but every time I opened my lips here I was insulted and laughed at for every word I spoke.

However, I gathered that the purport of the reply to my last inquiry was that the young Cadger *was* a thief, and I made one more attempt to gain information.

"Where are we going to now?" I asked.

"Going!" cried the pipe, with his insulting jeer.

"What, don't you know where you're a-going, old Turnip? You're a-going wherever he takes yer; ain't he, mate?"

It was positively painful to see how that vile piece of string wriggled as he replied,—

"Do you hear, Turnip? You're a-going wherever young Cadger takes yer. Now what do you think of that?"

It was impossible to continue a conversation with such low, ill-mannered creatures, and I therefore abandoned the attempt, having at least ascertained that I was at present located in a thief's pocket, that my immediate destination was vague, and that ultimately I might expect to become the property of a near relative of my present possessor.

Noticing that I became silent, the pipe and the string between them began to question me. But I was neither in the mood nor the desire to gratify their curiosity. They therefore contented themselves with cracking jokes at my expense, and thus we journeyed together a mile or two towards our unknown destination.

Presently a dirty little hand came groping down into our place of retreat. It first fumbled me and my chain, with a view, I suppose, to ascertain if we were all safe, and then proceeded among the other occupants of the pocket to secure and draw forth the half penny which I have before mentioned.

I was relieved to have even one of my unpleasant companions removed, and could not refrain from expressing my feelings by a sigh.

"What are you snivelling at, Turnip?" asked the pipe.

I did not deign to reply.

"Suppose yer think that there *sou*," (fancy the stump of a clay pipe speaking French!) "is gone for good, and good riddance, do yer? You wait a bit, that's all."

"Boh, boh!" chimed in the string. "Do you hear, Turnip? Wait till you see the soldier; then see how you'll laugh!"

"What soldier?" I inquired, my curiosity for a moment getting the better of my reserve. I could not imagine what possible connexion there could be between the military and the disreputable copper I had so lately seen depart.

I was not long in suspense, however, for before my two vulgar companions could answer my question, the "soldier" made his appearance.

The dirty little hand again entered our quarters, and let fall in our midst a red herring! At the sight and smell of him I turned sick with disgust. Fancy a silver watch sat upon, squeezed, and besmeared by a reeking red herring. He came sprawling right on the top of me, the brute, his ugly mouth wide open and his loathsome fins scraping along my back. Ugh!

"That there's the soldier, Turnip; ain't it, mate?" called out the pipe.

"Do you hear, Turnip? this here's the soldier. How do you like him?" snuffled the string.

It was enough! I felt my nerves collapse, and my circulation fail, and for the remainder of that dreadful night I was speechless.

I was not, however, blind, or so far gone as to be unable to notice in a vague sort of way what happened.

The young gentleman rejoicing in the name of Cadger (but whose real cognomen I subsequently ascertained to be Stumpy Walker) proceeded on his walk, whistling shrilly to himself, exchanging a passing recognition with one and another loafer, and going out of his way to kick every boy he saw smaller than himself, which last exertion, by the way, at twelve o'clock at night he did not find very often necessary.

I observed that he did not go out of his way to avoid the police; on the contrary, he made a point of touching his hat to every guardian of the peace he happened to meet, and actually went so far as to inform one that "he'd want his muckintogs before morning"—a poetical way of prophesying rain.

He proceeded down a succession of back streets, which it would have puzzled a stranger to remember, till he came into a large deserted thoroughfare which was undergoing a complete renovation of its drainage arrangements. All along the side of the road extended an array of huge new pipes, some three feet in diameter, awaiting their turn underground. Into one of these Master Walker dived, and as it was just tall enough to allow of his sitting upright in its interior, and just long enough to allow his small person to lie at full length without either extremity protruding; and further, as the rain was just beginning to come down, I could not forbear, even in the midst of my misery, admiring his selection of a lodging.

Greatly to my relief, the "soldier," the crust, and the pipe were all three presently summoned from the pocket, and with the help of the first two and the consolation of the last, Master Walker contrived to make an evening meal which at least afforded *him* satisfaction.

Before making himself snug for the night he pulled me out, and by the aid of the feeble light of a neighbouring lamp-post, made a hasty examination of my exterior and interior. Having apparently satisfied himself as to my value, he put me and the pipe back into his dreadful pocket, from which, even yet, the

fumes of the "soldier" had not faded, and then curled himself up like a dormouse and composed himself to slumber.

He had not, however, settled himself many moments before another ragged figure came crawling down the inside of the pipes towards him. Stumpy started up at the first sound in a scared sort of way, but instantly resumed his composure on seeing who the intruder was.

"What cheer, Stumpy?" said the latter.

"What cheer, Tuppeny?" replied my master. "Where've yer been to?"

"Lunnon Bridge," replied Mr Tuppeny.

"An' what 'ave yer got?" asked Stumpy.

"Only a rag," said the other, in evident disgusts producing a white handkerchief.

"That ain't much; I've boned a turnip."

"Jus' your luck. Let's 'ave a look at him."

Stumpy complied, and his comrade, lighting a match, surveyed me with evident complacency.

"Jus' your luck," said he again. "Where did yer git 'im?"

"At the gaff, off a young cove as was reg'lar screwed up. I could 'ave took 'is nose off if I'd a wanted it, and he wouldn't have knowed."

"Then this 'ere rag might 'a been some use," replied the disconsolate Tuppeny. "'Tain't worth three'a'pence."

"Any marks?" inquired my master.

"Yees; there is so. C.N. it is; hup in one corner. He was sticking out of the pocket of a young chap as was going along with a face as long as a fooneral, and as miserable-lookin' as if 'e'd swallowed a cat."

C.N.! Could this handkerchief possibly have belonged to poor Charlie Newcome? His way home from Grime Street I knew would lead by London Bridge, and with the trouble of that

afternoon upon him, would he not indeed have looked as miserable as the thief described?

And these two boys, having thus briefly compared notes, and exhibited to one another their ill-gotten gains, curled themselves up and fell fast asleep.

Dear reader, does it ever occur to your mind that there are hundreds of such vagrants in this great city? Night after night they crowd under railway arches and sheds, on doorsteps and in cellars. They have neither home nor friend. To many of them the thieves' life is their natural calling; they live as animals live, and hope only as animals hope, and when they die, die as animals die; ignorant of God, ignorant of good, ignorant of their own souls. Yet even for such as they, Christ died, and the Spirit strives.

The pipe, and his friend, the string, that night had a long conversation as their master lay asleep. They evidently thought I was asleep too, for they made no effort to conceal their voices, and I consequently heard every word.

It chiefly had reference to me, and was in the main satirical.

"Some coves is uncommon proud o' themselves, mate, ain't they?—particular them as ain't much account after all?"

"You're right, mate. Do you hear, Turnip? you ain't much account; you're on'y silver-plate, yer know, so you don't ought to be proud, you don't!"

"What I say," continued the pipe, "is that coves as gives 'emselves hairs above their stations is a miserable lot. What do *you* think?"

"What don't I?" snuffled the string. "Do you hear, Turnip? you're a miserable cove, you are. Why can't you be 'appy like me and my mate? We don't give ourselves hairs; that's why we're 'appy."

"And, arter all," pursued the pipe, "that's the sort of coves as go second-hand in the end. People 'ud think better on 'em if they didn't think such a lot of theirselves; wouldn't they now, mate?"

"Wouldn't they just! What do you think of that, Turnip? You're on'y a second-hand turnip, now, and that's all along of being stuck-up and thinking such a lot of yourself! You won't go off for thirty bob, you won't see!"

"Mate!" exclaimed the pipe, presently (after I had had leisure to meditate on the foregoing philosophical dialogue), "mate, I'll give you a riddle!"

"Go it!" said the mate.

"Why," asked the pipe, in a solemn voice, "is a second-hand pewter-plate, stuck-up turnip, like a weskit that ain't paid for?"

"Do you hear, Turnip? Why are you like a weskit that ain't paid for? Do yer give it up? I do."

"'Cos it's on tick!" pronounced the pipe.

I could have howled to find myself the victim of such a low, villainous joke, that had not even the pretence of wit, and I could have cried to see how that greasy string wriggled and snuffled at my expense.

"My eye, mate! that's a good 'un! Do you hear, Turnip? you're on tick, you know, like the weskit. Oh, my eye! that'll do, mate; another o' them will kill me. Oh, turn it up! do you hear? On tick!— hoo, hoo, hoo! Do you hear, Turnip? *tick*!"

Need I say I spent a sad and sleepless night? When my disgust admitted of thought I could not help reflecting how very happy some vulgar people can be with a very little sense, and how very unhappy other people who flatter themselves they are very clever and superior can at times find themselves.

By the time I had satisfied myself of this my master uncurled himself and got up.

Chapter Sixteen.

How I changed masters twice in two days, and after all found myself in pawn.

It was scarcely four o'clock when my lord and master arose from his brief repose, and sallied through the rain and darkness back in the direction of the city. He was far less anxious to salute the police now than he had been a few hours ago. He slunk down the back streets, and now and then darted up a court at the sound of approaching foot steps; or retreated for

some distance by the way he had come, in order to strike a less guarded street.

In this manner he pursued his way for about an hour, till he reached a very narrow street of tumble-down houses, not far from Holborn. Down this he wended his way till he stood before a door belonging to one of the oldest, dingiest, and most decayed houses in all the street. Here he gave a peculiar scrape with his foot along the bottom of the door, and then sat down on the doorstep.

Presently a voice came through the keyhole, in a whisper.

"That you, Stumpy?" it said.

"Yas," replied my master.

"All clear?"

Stumpy looked up and down the street and then hurriedly whispered, "No."

Instantly the voice within was silent, and Stumpy was to all appearance sleeping soundly and heavily, as if tired nature in him had fairly reached its last strait.

The distant footsteps came nearer; and still he slept on, snoring gently and regularly. The policeman advanced leisurely, turning his lantern first on this doorway, then on that window; trying now a shutter-bar, then a lock. At last he stood opposite the doorstep where Stumpy lay. It was a critical moment. He turned his lamp full on the boy's sleeping face, he took hold of his arm and gently shook him, he tried the bolt of the door against which he leaned. The sleeper only grunted drowsily and settled down to still heavier slumber, and the policeman, evidently satisfied, walked on.

"Is he gone?" asked the voice within, the moment the retreating footsteps showed this.

"Yas, but he'll be back," whispered the boy.

And so he was. Three times he paced the street, and every time found the boy in the same position, and wrapped in the same profound slumber. Then at last he strode slowly onward to the end of his beat, and his footsteps died gradually away.

"Now?" inquired the voice.

"Yas," replied Stumpy.

Whereat the door half-opened, and Stumpy entered.

It was a dirty, half-ruinous house, in which the rats had grown tame and the spiders fat. The stairs creaked dismally as Stumpy followed his entertainer up them, while the odours rising from every nook and cranny in the place were almost suffocating.

The man led the way into a small room, foul and pestilential in its closeness. In it lay on the floor no less than nine or ten sleeping figures, mostly juveniles, huddled together, irrespective of decency, health, or comfort. Stumpy surveyed the scene composedly.

"Got lodgers, then," he observed.

"Yes, two on 'em—on'y penny ones, though."

Just then a sound of moaning came from one corner of the room, which arrested Stumpy's attention.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"Old Sal; she's bad, and I reckon she won't last much longer the way she's a-going on. I shall pack her off to-day."

Stumpy whistled softly; but it was evident, by the frequent glances he stole every now and then towards the corner where the sufferer lay, that he possessed a certain amount of interest in the woman described as "Old Sal."

The man who appeared to be the proprietor of this one well-filled lodging-room was middle-aged, and had a hare-lip. He had an expression half careworn, and half villainous, of which he gave Stumpy the full benefit as he inquired.

"What 'ave yer got?"

"Got, pal?" replied Stumpy; "a ticker."

"Hand it up," said the man, hurriedly.

Stumpy produced me, and the man, taking me to the candle, examined me greedily and minutely.

Then he said,—

"I shall get fifteen bob for him."

"Come, now, none of your larks!" replied Stumpy, who had produced the pipe, and was endeavouring to rekindle its few remaining embers at the candle; "try ag'in."

"Well, I don't see as he'll fetch seventeen-and-six, but I'll do it for *you*."

"Try ag'in," coolly replied Stumpy.

The man did try again, and named a sovereign, which my master also declined.

In this manner he advanced to twenty-four shillings.

"Won't do," said Stumpy.

"Then you can take 'im off," said the man, with an oath; "he ain't worth the money."

"Yas 'e is, an' a tanner more," put in Stumpy.

The man uttered a few more oaths, and again examined me. Then he dropped me in his pocket, and slowly counted out the purchase-money from a drawer at his side.

Stumpy watched the process eagerly, doubtless calculating with professional interest how the entire hoard of this thieves' broker could at some convenient opportunity be abstracted. However, for the present he made sure of the sum given him, and dropped the coins one by one into his tail pocket.

"Now lay down," said the man, "and make yourself comfortable."

I fancy Stumpy was a good deal more comfortable in his drain-pipe an hour or two ago than in this foul, choking lodging-room; however, he curled himself up on the floor near the dying woman, and did his share in exhausting the air of the apartment.

I should offend all rules of good taste and decency if I described the loathsome room; I wish I could forget it, but that I shall never do. Suffice it to say daylight broke in at last on the squalid scene, and then one by one the sleepers rose and departed—all but Stumpy and she whose groaning had risen ceaselessly and hopelessly the livelong night.

"Old Sal's very bad," said Stumpy to his host.

"Yas, she'll have to clear out of here."

"She's nigh dying, I reckon," said the boy.

"Can't help that; she ain't paid a copper this three weeks, and I ain't a-going to have her lumbering up my place no longer."

"Where's she a-going to?" asked Stumpy.

"How do I know?—out of 'ere, anyways, and pretty soon, too. I can tell yer."

"Pal," said the boy, after a long pause, "I charged yer a tanner too much for that there ticker; here you are, lay hold."

And he tossed back the sixpence. The man understood quite well the meaning of the act, and Old Sal lay undisturbed all that day.

Stumpy took his departure early. I have never seen him since; what has become of him I know not; where he is now I know still less.

But to return to myself. I spent that entire day in the man's pocket, too ill to care what became of me, and too weak to notice much of what passed around me. I was conscious of others like Stumpy coming up the creaking stairs and offering their ill-gotten gains as he had done; and I was conscious towards evening, when the last rays of the setting sun were struggling feebly through the dingy window, of a groan in that dismal corner, deeper than all that had gone before. Then I knew Old Sal was dead. In an hour the body was laid in its rude coffin, and had made its last journey down those stairs: and that night another outcast slept in her corner.

The night was like the one which had preceded it, foul and sickening. I was thankful that my illness had sufficiently deadened my senses to render me unable to hear and see all that went on during those hours. Morning came at length, and one by one the youthful lodgers took their departure. When the last had left, my possessor produced a bag, into which he thrust me, with a score or more of other articles acquired as I had been acquired; then, locking the door behind him, he descended the stairs and stepped out.

Oh, the delight of that breath of fresh morning air! Even as it struggled in through the crevices and cracks of that old bag, it was like a breath of Paradise, after the vile, pestilential atmosphere of that room!

As we went on, I had leisure to observe the company of which I formed one. What a motley crew we were! There were watches, snuff-boxes, and pencils, bracelets and brooches, handkerchiefs and gloves, studs, pins, and rings—all huddled together higgledy-piggledy. We none of us spoke to one another, nor inquired whither we were going; we were a sad, spiritless assembly, and to some of us it mattered little what became of us.

Still I could not help wondering if the man in whose possession I and my fellow-prisoners found ourselves was Stumpy's "uncle," referred to by that miserable clay pipe. If he was, I felt I could not candidly congratulate that youth on his relative. What he could want with us all I could not imagine.

If I had been the only watch, and if there hadn't been half a dozen scarf-pins, snuff-boxes, and pencils, it would not have been so extraordinary. It would have been easy enough to imagine the person of Stumpy's "aunt" decorated with one brooch, two bracelets, and three or four rings; but when instead of that modest allowance these articles were present by the half-dozen, it was hardly possible to believe that any one lady could accommodate so much splendour. How ever, I could only suppose the superfluous treasures were destined for Stumpy's cousins, masculine and feminine, and occupied the rest of the journey in the harmless amusement of wondering to whose lot I was likely to fall.

The man walked some considerable distance, and strangely enough bent his steps in a direction not far removed from Saint Elizabeth's Hospital. Surely he was not going to restore me to Tom Drift! No; we passed the end of Grime Street. There were milkmen's carts rattling up and down; servants were scrubbing doorsteps; and a few sleepy-looking men, with their breakfasts in their hands, were scurrying off to work. It was all the same as usual; yet how interesting, all of a sudden, the dull street had become to me. It was here I had last seen poor Charlie, outraged and struck by the friend he strove to save, creeping slowly home; it was here Tom Drift still dwelt, daily sinking in folly and sin, with no friend now left to help him. Poor Tom Drift! How gladly would I have returned to him, even to be neglected and ill-used, if only I might have the opportunity once

again of fulfilling that charge put upon me by my first master, and which yet ever rang in my ears,—

"Be good to Tom Drift."

But it was not to be yet. The man walked rapidly on down a street parallel with Grime Street, at the farthest corner of which stood a small private house.

Here he knocked.

The occupant of the house evidently knew and expected him, for he at once admitted him, and led the way upstairs into a private parlour. Here the thieves' broker emptied the contents of his bag, laying the articles one by one on the table.

The man of the house looked on in an unconcerned way while this was taking place, picking up now one, now another of the objects, and examining them superficially. When the bag was empty, and the whole of the ill-gotten booty displayed, he remarked, "Not so much this time, Bill."

"No; trade's bad, sir," replied he who owned the bag.

"Well, I'll send the most of 'em down to the country to-day," resumed the master of the house.

"When shall I call, sir?" inquired Stumpy's friend.

"Monday. But look here, Bill!" said the other, taking me up, "it's no use leaving this; I shall be able to manage the gold ones, but this is no good."

I had long lost the pride which in former days would have made me resent such a remark, and patiently waited for the result.

Stumpy's friend took me back. "Well," he said, "if you can't, you can't. I'll see to him myself. Well, good-day; and I'll call on Monday."

And he turned to depart, with me in his hand. In a minute, however, he came back. "Would yer mind lending me some togs, sir, for a few minutes?" said he; "I don't want no questions asked at the pawnshop."

And he certainly did not look, in his present get-up, as the likeliest sort of owner of a silver watch. The man of the house, however, lent him some clothes, in which he arrayed himself,

and which so transformed him that any one would have taken him, not for the disreputable thieves' broker he was, but for the unfortunate decayed gentleman he professed to be. In this guise he had no difficulty in disposing of me at the nearest pawnbroker's shop, which happened to be at the corner of Grime Street.

The pawnbroker asked no questions, and I am sure never suspected anything wrong. He advanced thirty shillings on me and the chain, gave the man his ticket, and put a corresponding one on me.

Then Stumpy's friend departed, and my new master went back to his breakfast.

Chapter Seventeen.

How Tom Drift gets lower still.

Two years passed.

They were, without exception, the dullest two years I, or, I venture to say, any watch made, ever spent. There I lay, run down, tarnished and neglected, on the pawnbroker's shelf, never moved, never used, never thought of. Week followed week, and month month, and still no claimant for me came.

Other articles on the shelves beside me came and went, some remaining only a day, some a week, but I survived them all. Even my friend the chain took his departure, and left me without a soul to speak to.

None of the hundreds of tickets handed in bore the magic number 2222, which would have released me from my ignoble custody, and, in time, I gave up expecting it, and settled down to the old-fogeydom of my position, and exacted all the homage due to the "father of the shop" from my restless companions.

My place was at the end of a long shelf, next to the screen dividing the shop from the office, and my sole amusement during those two dreary years was peeping through a crack and watching my master's customers. They were of all sorts and all conditions, and many of them became familiar.

There was the little girl, for instance, the top of whose bonnet just reached as high as the counter, who, regularly every Monday morning, staggered in under the weight of a bundle containing her father's Sunday clothes, and, as regularly every Saturday evening, returned to redeem them. It was evident her respectable parent did not attend many evening parties between those two days, for I never remember his sending for them except at the regular times.

Then there was the wretched drunkard, who crept in stealthily, with now a child's coat, now a picture, now a teapot; and with the money thus raised walked straight across the road to the public-house. And there was his haggard, worn wife, who always came next day with the ticket, and indignantly took back her household goods. There was the young sailor's wife, too, with her baby in her arms, who came rarely at first, but afterwards more often, to pawn her few poor treasures, until at length a glad day came when the brawny tar himself, with his pockets full of cash, came with her and redeemed them every one.

I could tell of scores of others if I wished, but I have my own life to record, and not the transactions of my master, the pawnbroker.

One day, towards the end of the first year, the door opened softly and quickly, and there entered into the office a youth, haggard and reckless-looking, whom, I thought, surely I had seen before. I looked again.

Was it possible? Yes! this was none other than Tom Drift! But oh, how changed! A year ago, erring and wayward as he had been, he was yet respectable; his dress was the dress of a gentleman; his bearing was that of a gentleman too; his face had been naturally intelligent and pleasant; and his voice clear and cheerful. But now! There was a wild, restless roll about his eyes, a bright flush on his hollow cheeks, a dulness about his mouth, a hoarseness in his voice, which seemed to belong to another being. He was dissipated and seedy in appearance, and hung his head, as though ashamed to meet a fellow-being's look, and, instead of one, looked at least ten years older than he had.

Such a wreck will evil ways make of a youth! He looked eagerly round, to see that no one but he was in the office, and then produced from his pocket a scarf-pin.

"What will you give me for this?" he whispered.

The pawnbroker took it up and turned it over. It was a handsome pin, with a pearl in the front.

“Ten shillings,” said the pawnbroker.

“What!” exclaimed Tom; “do you know what it’s worth?”

“Ten shillings is all I can give you,” curtly replied the pawnbroker.

Tom gulped down a groan. “Give me the money, then, for goodness’ sake,” he said.

The pawnbroker coolly and deliberately made out the ticket, while Tom stood chafing impatiently.

“Be quick, please!” he said, as though fearful of some one detecting him in a crime.

“Don’t you be in a hurry,” said the pawnbroker.

“Here’s the ticket.”

“And the ten shillings?” broke in Tom.

“You shall have it,” said my master, going to his drawer.

To Tom it seemed ages while the silver was being counted, and when he had got it he darted from the shop as swiftly as he had entered it.

“That fellow’s going wrong,” muttered the pawnbroker to himself, as he laid the pin on the shelf beside me.

I recognised it at once as having often been my companion on Tom’s dressing-table at nights, but I myself was so discoloured and ill that it did not at first know me. I was too anxious, however, to hear some thing about Tom to allow myself to remain disguised.

“Don’t you know me, scarf-pin?” I asked.

He looked hard at me. “Not a bit,” he said.

“I’m Tom Drift’s old watch.”

“You don’t say so! So you are! How ever did you come here? Did he pawn you?”

"No; I was stolen from him one night at the music-hall, and pawned here by the thief."

"Ah, that music-hall!" groaned the pin; "that place has ruined Tom Drift."

"When I left him," I said, "he was just going to the bad as hard as he could. He had broken with his best friend, and seemed completely—"

"Hold hard! what friend?" interposed the pin.

"Charlie Newcome, my first master; they had a quarrel the day I was stolen."

"That must be nearly two years ago?" said the pin.

"Just," said I. "Do tell me what has happened since then."

"It's a long story," said the pin.

"Never mind, we've nothing else to do here," I said encouragingly.

"Well," said the pin, "the night you were lost Tom never turned up at home at all."

"He was utterly drunk," I said, by way of explanation.

"Don't you interrupt," said the pin, "or I won't tell you anything."

I was silenced.

"Tom never turned up at all until the next morning; and he sat all that day in his chair, and did nothing but look at the wall in front of him."

"Poor fellow!" I could not help saying.

"There you go!" said the pin; "be good enough to remember what I said, and if you can't endure to hear of anybody sitting and looking at a wail, it's no use my going on with my story."

"I only meant that I could imagine how miserable he was that day," said I; "but go on, please."

"Two or three days after, Charlie Newcome called. Tom was alone, but he refused to see him. He cursed to himself when he heard the name. Charlie went back disappointed, but Tom made a great boast to his 'friends' that same night of his 'cold shoulder to the prig,' as he called it, and they highly applauded him for his sense.

"Again, a week later, Charlie called once more, but with the same result. He wrote letters, but Tom put them in the fire unread; he sent books, but they were all flung into a corner. In a thousand different ways he contrived to show Tom that, though ill-used and in suited, he was still his friend, and ready to serve him whenever opportunity should offer.

"All this while Tom was sinking lower and lower in self-respect. He was contracting a habit of drinking, and in a month or two after you had left he rarely came home sober."

"And what about his bad friends?" asked I.

"There you are! why can't you let me tell my story in peace? His bad friends visited him daily at first, made a lot of him, and praised him loudly for his resolution in dismissing Charlie, and for his 'growing a man at last.' They lent him money, they lost to him at cards and billiards, and they made his downward path as easy for him as possible.

"At last, about six months ago, Tom was found tipsy in the dissecting-room at the hospital, and cautioned by the Board. A fortnight later he was found in a similar state in one of the wards, and then he was summarily expelled from the place, and his name was struck off the roll of students."

"Has it come to that?" I groaned.

"Come to that? Of course it has; I shouldn't have said so if it hadn't," replied the testy pin, who seemed unable to brook the slightest interruption. "He took a fit of blues after that; he went to the Board, and begged to be allowed to return to his studies, representing that all his prospects in life depended on his finishing his course there. They gave him one more chance. In his gratitude he resolved to discard his companions, and actually sat down and wrote a letter to Charlie, begging him to come and see him."

"Did he really?" I exclaimed, trembling with eagerness.

"All right, I shall not tell you of it again. Stop me once more, and you'll have to find the rest of my story out for yourself."

"I'm very sorry," said I.

"So you ought to be. When it came to the time, however, Tom's resolutions failed him. Gus and his friends called as usual that evening and laughed him to scorn. He dare not quarrel with them, dare not resist them. He crumpled up the letter in his pocket and never posted it, and that night returned to his evil ways without a struggle.

"For a week or two, however, he kept up appearances at the hospital; but it could not last. A misdemeanour more serious than the former one caused his second expulsion, and this time with an intimation that under no circumstances would he be readmitted. That was three months ago. He became desperate, and at the same time the behaviour of Gus altered. Instead of flattering and humouring him, he became imperious and spiteful. And still further, he demanded to be repaid the money he had advanced to Tom. Tom paid what little he could, and borrowed the rest from Mortimer. He got behindhand with his rent, and his landlady has given him notice. As usual, everybody to whom he owes money has found out his altered circumstances, and is down on him. The keeper of the music-hall, the tailor, the cigar merchant, are among the most urgent."

"And your being here is a result of all this, I see," said I, knowing the story was at an end, and considering my tongue to be released.

"Find out!" angrily retorted the pin, relapsing into ill-tempered silence.

I had little enough inclination to revert to the sad topic, and for the rest of that day gave myself up to sorrow and pity for Tom Drift. One thing I felt pretty sure of—it would not be long before he came again; and I was right.

In two days he entered the office, wild and haggard as before, but with less care to conceal his visit.

This time he laid on the counter the famous lance-wood fishing-rod which Charlie had given him months ago, and which surely ought to have been a reminder to him of better times.

He flung it down, and taking the few shillings the pawnbroker advanced on it, hurried from the shop.

The next time he came some one else was in the shop. A passing flush came over Tom's face on discovering a witness to his humiliation; but he transacted his business with an assumed swagger which ill accorded with his inward misery. For even yet Tom Drift had this much of hope left in him—that he knew he was fallen, and was miserable at the thought. His self-respect and sensitiveness had been growing less day by day, and he himself growing proportionately hardened; but still he knew what remorse was, and by the very agony of his shame was still held out of the lowest of all depths—the depths of ruthless sin.

The stranger in the shop eyed him keenly, and when he had gone said to the pawnbroker, "He's a nice article, he is!"

"Not much good, I'm thinking," observed the pawnbroker, dryly.

"So you may say; I know the beauty. He banged me on the 'ed with a chair once, when he was screwed. Never mind, I know of two or three as is after him."

And so saying, the disreputable man departed.

After that Tom came daily. Now it was an article of clothing, now some books, now some furniture, that he brought. It was soon evident that not only was he miserable and destitute, but ill too; and when presently for a fortnight he never passed the now well-known door, I knew that the fever had laid him low.

Poor Tom Drift! I wondered who was there now to nurse him in his weakness and comfort him in his wretchedness. He must be untended and unheeded. Well I knew his "friends" (oh, sad perversion of the sacred title!) would keep their distance, or return only in time to quench the first sparks of repentance. If only Charlie could have seen him at this time, with his spirit cowed and his weary heart beating about in vain for peace and hope, how would he not have flown to his bedside, and from those ruins have striven to help him to rise again to purity and honesty.

But no Charlie was there. Since the last appealing letter so scornfully rejected, Tom had heard not a word of him or from him. What wonder indeed if after so many disappointments and insults, the boy should at length leave his old schoolfellow to his fate?

With returning health there came to Tom no returning resolutions or efforts. The friends who had deserted his sick-bed were ready, as soon as ever he rose from it, with their temptations and baneful influence. One of his first visits after his recovery was to my master with a pair of boots. He looked so pale and feeble that the pawnbroker inquired after his health—a most unusual departure from business on the part of that merchant.

"Hope you're feeling better," he said.

"Yes; so much the better for you," replied Tom with a ghastly smile. "What can you give me for these, they are nearly new?"

"Five shillings?"

"Oh, anything you like; I've to pay two pounds to-morrow. What you give me is all I shall have to do it with—I don't care!"

The pawnbroker counted out the five shillings, and handed them across the counter.

"Good-bye!" said Tom, with another attempt at a smile; "I shall have to change my address to-morrow."

And with that he turned on his heel. I watched him through the window as he left the shop. He walked straight across the road and went in at the public-house opposite.

And that glimpse was the last sight I had of Tom Drift for many, many months.

Chapter Eighteen.

How I was knocked down by an auctioneer, and picked up by a countryman.

One day, about two years after my arrival at the pawnbroker's shop, an unusual circumstance happened to break the monotony of my unruffled existence. This was nothing more nor less than a Clearance Sale. I must tell you how it happened.

For a week, every night, I saw my master poring over a big account-book in his parlour, comparing the entries in it with those of his pawn-tickets, and marking off on one list what

articles had been pawned and redeemed, and on another what had been pawned and still remained unredeemed. So lengthy and complicated a process was this that it consumed the entire week. The next week further indications of a coming change manifested themselves. A printer came to the office with a bill for approval, worded as follows:—

> "Great Clearance Sale! The entire valuable and miscellaneous unredeemed stock of a pawnbroker will be sold by auction at the Central Mart, on Monday next, by Mr Hammer. Sale to commence at twelve o'clock precisely. Catalogues will be ready on Saturday, and may be had on application."

Thus I, and one or two of my neighbours on the shelf, read as we peeped through the crack at the printer's proof-sheet.

"'Entire valuable and miscellaneous unredeemed stock!' that's a good bit of writing," observed a pair of silver sugar-tongs near me; "that means you and me and the rest, Ticker. Who'd have thought of us getting such a grand name!"

"Well, it strikes me we, at least I, have been lying here idle long enough," said I; "it's two years since I came here."

"Bless you, that's no time," said the tongs. "I knew a salt-spoon lay once ten years before he was put up—but then, you know, we silver things are worth our money any time."

"Yes," said I, "we are."

The tongs laughed. "You don't suppose I meant you when I talked of silver things, do you?"

"Of course I am a silver watch."

"You're a bigger muff than I took you for," replied the aristocratic tongs, turning his hall-mark towards me. It was humiliating. Of course I ought to have known I was not solid silver, and had no claim to class myself of the same metal as a genuine silver pair of tongs.

It was but one of many painful lessons I have had during my life not to give myself airs beyond my station.

These solid silver goods certainly constituted the "upper ten thousand" of our valuable and miscellaneous community. When the time came for cataloguing us all, they separated themselves

from the rest of us, and formed a distinct society, having their several names recorded in full at the head of the list.

What a scene it was the day the catalogue came to our department! I suffered a further humiliation then by being almost entirely overlooked. A great tray of silver watches lay on the bench, brought together from all parts of the shop; and, to my horror, I found I was not among them.

"That's the lot," said the pawnbroker.

"Very good," said the auctioneer, who was making the catalogue; "shall we take leather bags next?"

"As you please," said my master.

"Hold hard," said the auctioneer, hastily counting the watches on the tray and comparing the number with a list he held in his hand, "there's one short."

"Is there? I don't know how that can be."

"You've got twenty-two down here and there's only twenty-one on the tray."

The pawnbroker looked puzzled.

"Better call over the number," said the auctioneer. So my master called out the number attached to each watch, and the auctioneer ticked it off on his list. When the last had been called, he said,—

"Where's Number 2222?"

"Ah, to be sure, that's the one," said the pawnbroker, reaching up to where I lay, and taking me down; "this one. I'd forgotten all about him."

Flattering, certainly! and still more so when the auctioneer, surveying my tarnished and dingy appearance, said, "Well, he's not much of a show after all. You'd better rub him up a bit, or we shan't get him off hand at all."

"Very good," said the pawnbroker, and I was handed over forthwith to an assistant to be cleaned. And much I needed it. My skin was nearly as black as a negro's, and my joints and muscles were perfectly clogged with dust. I had a regular watch's Turkish bath. I was scrubbed and powdered, my works

were taken out and cleaned, my joints were oiled, my face was washed, and my hands were polished. Altogether I was overhauled, and when I took my place on the tray with my twenty-one companions I was altogether a new being, and by no means the least presentable of the company.

How we quarrelled and wrangled, and shouldered one another on that tray! There was such a Babel of voices (for each of us had been set going) that scarcely any one could hear himself speak. Nothing but recriminations and vituperations rose on every hand.

"Get out of the way, ugly lever," snarled one monstrous hunter watch near me, big enough for an ordinary clock. "Who do you suppose wants you? Get out of the way, do you hear?"

"Where to?" I inquired, not altogether liking to be so summarily ordered about, and yet finding the excitement of a little quarrel pleasant after two years' monotony.

"Anywhere, as long as you get out of my way. Do you know I'm a hundred years old?"

"Are you, though?" said I. "People must have had bigger pockets in those days than they have now!"

This I considered a very fair retort for his arrogance, and left him snorting and croaking to himself, and bullying some other little watches, whom, I suppose, he imagined would be more deferential to his grey hairs than I was.

I was not destined, however, to be left in peace.

"Who are you?" I heard a sharp voice say. Looking round, I saw a creature with a great eye in the middle of his face, and a long, lanky hand spinning round and round over his visage.

"Who are *you*, rather?" I replied.

It was evidently what he wanted, for he began at once: "I'm all the latest improvements—compensation balance and jewelled in four holes; perfect for time, beauty, and workmanship; sound, strong, and accurate; with keyless action, and large full-dial second hand; air-tight, damp-tight, and dust-tight; seven guineas net and five per cent, to teetotalers. There, what do you think of that?"

"I think," said I, with a laugh, in which a good many others joined, "that if you're so tight as all that teetotalers had better do without you."

It will be observed the scenes and company I had been in of late years had tended to improve neither my temper nor my manners.

In this way we spent most of the day before the auction, and it was quite a relief early next morning to find ourselves being removed to the "Central Mart."

It was impossible, however, to resist the temptation of another quarrel in our tray while we were waiting for the sale to begin. The culprit in this instance was a certain Queen Anne's shilling attached to the chain of an insignificant-looking watch.

"What business has that ugly bit of tin here?" asked a burly hunter.

"Who calls me an ugly bit of tin?" squeaked out the coin.

"I do; there!" said the hunter; "now what have you got to say?"

"Only that you're a falsehood. Why, you miserable, machine-made, wheezing, old make-believe of a turnip—"

"Draw it mild, young fellow," said the hunter.

"Do you know that I was current coin of the realm before the tin mine that supplied your carcass was so much as discovered? I'm a Queen Anne's shilling!"

"Are you, though? And what good are you now, my ancient Bob?"

The shilling grew, so to speak, black in the face.

"I won't be called a Bob! I'm not a Bob! Who dares call me a Bob?"

"I do, Bob; there, Bob. What do you think of that, Bob? What's the use of you, Bob, eh? Can *you* tell the time, Bob, eh, Bob, Bob, Bob?"

And we all took up the cry, and from that moment until the time of our sale every sound, for us, was drowned in a ceaseless cry of "Bob!" in the midst of which the unlucky Queen Anne's

shilling crawled under his watch, and devoutly wished he were as undoubtedly dead as the illustrious royal lady whose image and superscription he had the misfortune to bear.

In due time the sale began. Among the earliest lots I recognised my acquaintance the solid silver sugar-tongs, which went for very nearly his full value, thus confirming me in my belief that, after all, there's nothing like the genuine thing all the world over.

After the disposal of the silver goods—for which comparatively few people bid, and that with little or no competition—the real excitement of the auction began.

"I have here, ladies and gentlemen," said the auctioneer, "a remarkably fine and superior lot of silver watches, all of which have been carefully cleaned and kept in order, and which, I can safely say, are equal to, if not better than, new. In many cases the watches are accompanied by chains of a very elegant and chaste description, which appendages considerably enhance their value. When I inform you that we value the contents of this tray, at the very lowest, at £90, being an average of £4 per watch, you will see I am not presenting to you any ordinary lot of goods. I will put up the watches singly in the order in which they are described in the catalogue."

Some of the company looked as if they were not sure whether they ought not to say "Hear, hear!" after this very elegant and polished speech, but they restrained their admiration, and reserved their energies for the bidding.

As I was last on the list I had full opportunity of noticing how my fellows fared, and was specially curious to see how the three or four watches whose acquaintance I had chanced to make went off.

The common-looking watch with the unlucky "Bob" attached to its chain was knocked down for £3 5 shillings, which, on the whole, was a triumph to the mortified coin, for it is certain without him the lot would not have fetched nearly so much, and his triumph was further enhanced by the fact that the hunter with whom he had had his altercation fetched only £2 17 shillings 6 pence. However, there was no time for jeers and recriminations at present, we were all too deeply absorbed in watching the fate of our fellows and speculating on our own.

The compensation balance, keyless, air-tight, seven-guinea grandee was the next to be put up, and the first bid for him was £1 10s.

"That I should have lived to hear that!" I heard the poor creature gasp.

"And if he's a teetotaler," I murmured, by way of encouragement, "that only means £1 8 shillings 6 pence!"

"Scoffer! be silent and leave me to my misery," said the keyless one, in a solemn tone.

The bidding improved considerably. He was run up to £2, £2 10 shillings, £3, £3 10 shillings, and finally to £4.

"Nothing more for this very magnificent watch?" said the auctioneer; "I positively cannot let him go for a song."

No answer.

"I wish gentlemen would take the trouble to look at it," continued the persevering official; "they could not fail to see it was worth twice the money bid."

Still no answer.

"Did I understand you to bid four five, sir?" said the auctioneer to an innocent-looking stripling near the door. "Thank you."

The stripling, however, disclaimed the soft impeachment, and looked very guilty as he did so.

"Well, there seems no help for it. I wish I were down among you gentlemen. I'd take good care not to lose this chance."

No answer.

"Then I must knock it down. Going, going, gone, sir; it's yours, and dirt cheap, too."

All this was encouraging for me. If a seven-guinea watch goes for four pounds, for how much will a three-guinea one go?

This was a problem which I feebly endeavoured to solve as I lay waiting my turn.

It came at last. I felt myself lifted on high, and heard my merits pronounced in the words of the catalogue.

"Lot 68. London made, lever, open-face watch, capped and jewelled, in very fine order."

"Look for yourselves, gentlemen."

The gentlemen did look for themselves, and complimented me by a preliminary bid of 15 shillings.

The auctioneer laughed a pleasant laugh, as much as to say, "That is a capital joke," and waited for the next bid.

It was not long in coming, and I advanced rapidly by half-crowns to thirty shillings. Here I made sure I should stop, for this was the figure at which the pawnbroker himself had valued me. But no; such are the vagaries of an auction, I went on still, up to £2, and from that to £2 10 shillings. Surely there was some mistake. I looked out to see who they were who were thus bidding for me, and fancied I detected in that scrutiny the secret of my unexpected value.

It was a countryman bidding—endeavouring in his downright way to become my possessor, and wholly unconscious of the array of Jews against him, who bid him up from half-crown to half-crown until I had nearly reached my original value.

"Three pounds," at last said one of the Jews.

The countryman had evidently come to the end of his tether, and did not answer the challenge.

"Three pounds," said the auctioneer; "you're not going to stop, sir?"

The countryman said nothing.

"Try once more," said the auctioneer; but the rustic was silent.

"Three pounds; no more? Going, going—"

"Guineas!" roared the countryman, at the last moment.

"Thank you, sir; I thought you were not going to be beaten. Three guineas, gentlemen; who says more? Nobody? Going, then, to you, sir; going, going, gone!"

And so, once more, I changed masters.

Chapter Nineteen.

How, after much ceremony, I found myself in the pocket of a genius.

Muggerbridge is a straggling, picturesque little midland village, with one principal street, an old church, a market-place, and a pound. Its population, all told, does not number a thousand, the majority of whom are engaged in agriculture; its houses are for the most part old-fashioned and poor, though clean; and altogether its general character and appearance combine to proclaim the village an unpretending English hamlet, with nothing whatever but its name to distinguish it from a hundred others like it.

It was here I found myself duly installed in the window of the village jeweller's—held out as a bait to the purses of Muggerbridge. The countryman who had purchased me was a big enough man in his own place, though very little had been made of him in the "Central Mart." He was jeweller, silversmith, church warden, postmaster, and special Muggerbridge correspondent to the London *Thunderbolt* all in one here, and appeared to be aware of his accumulated dignities!

It was his custom twice a year to visit London for the purpose of replenishing his stock. It was the common talk of the place that he always returned from such expeditions with prodigies of bargains, which went far to encourage the popular tradition as to the prodigal wealth of the metropolis. People who knew him in town, on the other hand, always laughed at him, and were unkind enough to hint that he never by any chance bought an article at less than its full price, and often paid an extremely fanciful ransom for his purchases.

The churchwarden and postmaster of Muggerbridge would have been very indignant had such an insinuation ever reached his ears. It never did, happily, and the worthy man was consequently always well satisfied with his purchases; which—whatever he gave for them—he always contrived to sell at a very respectable profit.

It was with a view to this profit that I found myself looking out of Mr Argent's window, in the High Street of Muggerbridge, with

a ticket round my neck, conveying the (to me) very gratifying information that "this superb watch was to be disposed of for the moderate amount of £4 10 shillings only," and a parenthesis below further indulged my vanity by volunteering the information that I was worth £6. It *did* occur to me to wonder why, if I was worth £6, Mr Argent should be such a donkey as to sell me for only three-quarters of that sum. Either he was a very benevolent man, or he was in immediate want of £4 10 shillings, or he had his doubts as to my alleged value. I somehow fancied the last was the true reason, and was half afraid he was right too.

Well, I looked out of Mr Argent's windows for two months, and by that time became acquainted with nearly all the inhabitants of Muggerbridge.

On my first arrival I was an object of a good deal of curiosity and admiration, for any change in a country shop window is an excitement, and when that change takes the form of a £6 "superb" watch offered for £4 10 shillings, it was no wonder the honest Muggerbridgians gaped in at me and read my label.

But in a very little time familiarity had bred contempt, and I lay almost unheeded by the outside world. The grocer opposite, with his triumphal arch of jam-pots monopolised all the wonder, and most of the admiration, and I had the mortification of seeing passers turn their backs on me, and step over the way to contemplate that vulgar structure.

I had, however, one or two constant admirers. One of these was a youth, scarcely more than a boy, with a very pale, thoughtful face. He was poorly dressed, but respectable. A book was generally tucked under his arm, and very often I could see his lips moving, as if repeating something to himself.

He paid me more attention than anybody. Every time he passed the shop he halted and looked at me, as I thought, wistfully, and usually appeared relieved to find me still in my place.

"George Reader's took a fancy to the new watch, I can see," I heard Mr Argent say one day to his wife.

He spoke, let me observe, in a very broad country dialect, which I do not feel equal to reproducing here.

"Poor lad!" said Mrs Argent; "I dare say he'd like to have it in his pocket when he goes to college."

"He is going, then?"

"Yes, for certain; the clergyman says it would be a sin for a boy of his cleverness not to go, and so I think."

"Well, learning's a great thing; and when a gamekeeper's son does take a fit of it, I suppose it's all right to humour it. But you and I, wife, can get on very well without it."

"Speak for yourself," retorted Mrs Argent; "I wish you had half as much in your head as that boy has got, that's all!"

"And I suppose you wish you'd got the other half, eh? Stuff!"

And after this little tiff the worthy couple were silent for a while. Presently Mrs Argent again spoke. "I wonder what they'll do about the church organ when George's gone?"

"Ah! you may say so," said the husband, with a touch of importance in his voice which became a churchwarden when speaking of church matters; "it'll be hard to fill his place there."

"So it will. Did you stay after the service on Sunday?"

"No; you know I had to go round to the curate's. Why?"

"Just because if you'd heard him play you'd have been glued to your chair, as I was. It was beautiful. I couldn't have got up from that chair if I'd tried."

"Good job you didn't try, if you were glued down, especially in your Sunday gown. I shouldn't care to have to buy many of them a month."

"Now, John, you know I've not had a new gown for nearly a year."

And then the talk took a departure over a range of topics to which I need not drag my unoffending reader. This short conversation sufficed to satisfy my curiosity in part as to the boy who was paying me such constant attention; and another event which shortly happened served to bring me into still closer acquaintance with George Reader. One day there entered the shop a party consisting of half a dozen persons. One of them was a young man in the dress of a clergyman, and the others I knew well by sight as respectable and respected villagers.

"Good-morning, Mr Argent," said the curate, for the clerical gentleman was none other; "we've come to see you on a little matter of business."

"Hope there's nothing wrong with the heating stoves in the church, sir," said Mr Argent, with an anxious face, "I was always against them being used at all."

"The stoves are quite well, I believe," said the curate, smiling; "our business is of quite a different kind. We've come to make a purchase, in fact."

Mr Argent's face brightened considerably, partly at the assurance as to the salubrity of the gas-stoves and partly at the prospect of business.

"What can I do for you, sir?" he said, no longer with his churchwarden's voice, but as the Muggerbridge silversmith.

"Well, we have been asked to select a small present to be given by the choir and congregation of our church to George Reader, who, I suppose you know, is going next week to college."

"I have heard tell of it, sir," said Mr Argent, "and my wife and I were only wondering the other day what was to become of the music at the church when he's gone."

"We don't like to think of it," said one of the party. "It would want a good one to take his place," said another.

"We shall all miss him," said the curate; "and we are anxious before he leaves us to present him with some little token of our regard. We have kept the thing from you, Mr Argent, as of course we should have to come to you to procure whatever we decided on getting, so your contribution to the gift will have to be some good advice on the matter we are still undecided about—what to get."

"I shall be very glad to help—have you decided—er—I mean—has anything been said—that is—about what—"

"About how much? Well, we have nearly four pounds—in fact, we might call it four. What have you about that price that would be suitable?"

Oh! how my heart fluttered, for I could guess by this time what was coming.

Mr Argent looked profound for a minute, and then said, “There’s one thing, I think, would do.”

“What?” asked the deputation.

He pulled me out of the window and laid me on the counter.

“A watch! Dear me! we thought of all sorts of things, but not once of that!”

“It would be a suitable present,” said one of the party; “but this one is £4 10.”

“That needn’t matter,” said Mr Argent; “if you like it my wife and I will settle about the difference.”

“That’s very kind of you, Mr Argent. Does any one know if George has a watch?”

“I know he hasn’t,” said one of the party. “And what’s more, I’ve heard him say he wishes he had one.”

“And I can answer for it he’s been looking in at my window at this very one every day for the last month,” said the silversmith.

“Well, what do you say to getting this, then? We needn’t ask you if it’s a good one, Mr Argent.”

“No, you needn’t, sir,” replied the smiling Mr Argent, who, as I had remained run down since the day he bought me, could not well have answered the question more definitely.

“You’ll clean it up, will you, and set it going, and send it to me this afternoon?” said the curate;—“and perhaps you would like to come with us to Reader’s cottage this evening, when we are going to present it?”

Mr Argent promised to form one of the party, and the deputation then left.

I was swiftly subjected to all the cleaning and polishing which brushes, wash-leather, and whiting could give me. I was wound up and set to the right time, and a neat piece of black watered ribbon was attached to my neck, and then I waited patiently till the time came for my presentation to my new master.

The gamekeeper's cottage to which I was conducted in state that evening was not an imposing habitation. It boasted of only three rooms, and just as many occupants. George, the hero of the occasion, was the son of its humble owner and his wife, and, as will have been gathered, had turned out a prodigy. From his earliest days he had displayed a remarkable aptitude for study. Having once learned to read at the village school, he became insatiable after books, and devoured all that came within his reach.

Happily he fell into the hands of a wise and able guide, the clergyman of the parish, who, early recognising the cleverness of the boy, strove to turn his thirst for learning into profitable channels, lent him books, explained to him what he failed to understand, incited him to thoroughness, and generally constituted himself his kind and helpful adviser.

The consequence of this timely tuition had been that George had grown up, not a boisterous, over bearing prig, showing off his learning at every available chance, and making himself detestable, and everybody else miserable, by his conceited air, but a modest, quiet scholar, with plenty of hidden fire and ambition, and not presuming on his talents to scorn his humble origin, or be ashamed of his home and parents—on the contrary, connecting them with all his dearest hopes of success and advancement in the world.

They, good souls, were quite bewildered by the sudden blaze of their son's celebrity. They hardly seemed to understand what it all meant, but had a vague sort of idea that they were implicated in "Garge's" achievements. They would sit and listen to him as he read to them, as if they were at an exhibition at which they had paid for admission, and it is not too much to say "Garge" was, in their eyes, almost as dreadful a personage as the lord of the manor himself.

Among his fellow-villagers George was, as the reader will have gathered, somewhat of a hero, and not a little of a favourite. This distinction he owed to a talent for music, which had at a very early age displayed itself, and had been heartily encouraged by the rector. In this pursuit, which he followed as his only recreation, he had made such progress that, while yet a boy, he became voluntary organist at the church, and as such had won the hearts of the neighbours.

They didn't know much about music, but they knew the organ sounded beautiful on Sundays, and that "Garge" played it. And

so it was a real trouble to them now that he was about to leave Muggerbridge.

You may imagine the state of excitement into which this unexpected visit threw simple Mr and Mrs Reader. The good lady was too much taken aback even to offer her customary welcome, and as for the gamekeeper, he sat stock still in his chair, with his eyes on his son, like a hound that waits the signal for action.

"We are rather an invasion, I'm afraid," said the curate, squeezing himself into the little kitchen between a clothes-horse and a dresser.

"Not at all," said George, looking very bewildered.

"Perhaps you'll wonder why we've come?" added the curate, turning to the gamekeeper.

"Maybe you've missed something, and thinks one of us has got it," was the cheerful suggestion.

The curate laughed, and the deputation laughed, and George laughed, and George's mother laughed, which made things much easier for all parties.

"No, we haven't missed anything, Mr Reader," replied the curate, "but we expect to miss *somebody*—George, and that is the reason of our visit."

And then the curate explained what the business was, and one of the churchwardens made a speech (the composition of which had kept him awake all the previous night), and then I was produced and handed over. And George blushed and stammered out something which nobody could understand, and George's mother began to cry, and George's father, unable otherwise to express his sense of the occasion, began to whistle. And so the little business was satisfactorily concluded, and the deputation withdrew, leaving me in the pocket of a new master. Three days afterwards both of us took our departure for Cambridge.

Chapter Twenty.

How my new master made trial of a pursuit of knowledge under difficulties.

But now let us follow Reader. My master's rooms at Saint George's College were of the poorest and meanest description; in fact it would not be too much to describe them—the bedroom and study—as being like a pair of big cupboards under a great staircase. They looked out on nothing more picturesque than a blank wall. They were carpeted with nothing better than an old drugget; and as for paper, the place would have looked better simply whitewashed. They were suffocating in summer and draughty in winter, and at nights afforded rendezvous to a whole colony of rats. Every step on the staircase above thundered down into the study; the loosely-hung windows rattled even in a light breeze, and the flavours of the college dustbins, hard by, appeared to have selected these chambers, above all others, for their favourite haunt. I am told Saint George's College has recently undergone renovation. It so, it is probable "the Mouse-trap"—for this was the designation by which George Reader's classical domain was familiarly styled—has disappeared. Let us hope so, for a more miserable, uncomfortable, and uninviting couple of rooms I never saw.

But they had one merit, and that a great one: they were cheap, which to George Reader meant everything. He had gained a small entrance scholarship, by the help of which he hoped, with the most rigid economy, to support himself during his college career. Most other young fellows would have shrunk from the prospect, but such was my master's ambition that I believe he would have endured life in a stable if only he could have there enjoyed the advantages and encouragements of a college course.

It was, at any rate, a fine sight to see him settle down in his new dispiriting quarters, determined to make the best of everything, and suffer nothing to damp his ardour for work. He unpacked his few precious books and laid them on the shelf; he hung up the likenesses of his father and mother over the chimney-piece; he produced the cheese which the latter had insisted on his bringing with him, and, as a crowning-effect, set me up on the mantel-shelf with as much pride as if I had been a marble clock.

"That looks something like!" he said to himself. "Now for a little tea, and then—grind!"

The little tea, however, was "sooner said than done." It involved a prolonged hunt for the "gyp," or attendant, and a still more prolonged conference on the subject of hot water, tea, and bread. The suggestions thrown out by the college official, too, were so very lordly and extravagant—such, for instance, as ham and eggs, chicken, marmalade, and chocolate—that poor George's heart fluttered as much as his mouth watered while he listened. Chicken and chocolate for a poor student who had barely enough money to afford so much as the luxury of living in the "Mouse-trap" of Saint George's! Well he might be scared at the idea! He politely declined the grand offer of his scout, and asking him to light a small fire and procure him a loaf, sallied out himself into the town and purchased a small and very cheap quantity of groceries. With these he returned in triumph to his rooms, and, with the utmost satisfaction, partook of his first college meal, with a Euclid open on the table beside him.

Then pouring out a final cup of tea to enjoy, cold, later on, he "cleared the decks for action," as he called it, which meant putting away the tea, butter, sugar, and bread in a cupboard, and folding up the table cloth. Poor George! he had no false pride to forbid such menial offices; he had not the brag about him which would have led another to stand on the staircase and howl "Gyp" till every one far and near should be made aware that he had had a meal which required clearing away. No; he was only a gamekeeper's son, in a hurry to get at his books; and to him it was far more natural to wait on his own frugal table than sit in state till a servant should come and clear it.

"Now," said he to himself, "I shall get a good quiet time for work. After all it's not bad to be one's own master where reading is concerned."

And without more ado he set himself down to his books, with me on the table at his elbow, and his cup of tea within reach, when such refreshment should be desirable. It was a fine thing to see this young fellow plunging straight into his work.

Assuredly he had not come to college to fritter away his time—to row, play cricket, give wine-parties, or drive dog-carts; he had not even come because it was "the thing," or afforded a "good introduction into the world." No, he was here for one purpose, and one alone. That was work. To him the days were as precious mines, and every minute a nugget. It mattered nothing to him who won the cricket-match this year, who occupied the rooms next his, how many bumps the Saint George's boat made on the river; far more important was the thought that perhaps the oil in his lamp would run short before

the night was out, or whether the edition of Plato his friend the Muggerbridge clergyman had given him was the best, and contained the fullest notes. In short, George Reader was in earnest.

But, like the tea, the "good quiet time" he hoped for was not so easy to secure. Scarcely had he settled down when the voices of two men in loud conversation rose, immediately under his window. Now, when one is in the agony of trying to understand how it comes that a certain number of angles in one figure are equal to a certain number of angles in another, it is, to say the least of it, confusing to have to listen to a spirited account of a boxing-match between Jack Straight and the Hon. Wilfred Dodge; and when that account manages to get interwoven inextricably with the problem in hand the effect is likely to be distracting; for instance:—

"Since the solid angle at B is contained by three plane angles, BAF, FAC, and CAB, then—"

"Jack let out and got in sweetly under his man's guard," and so on.

"Therefore," persevered George, "the angles ABC and ABF—"

"Rounded on him grandly, and—"

"The angles ABC and ABF are together greater than the angle CBF; and, similarly—"

Here the conversation was continued in language far more worthy of the disgraceful prize-ring than a college, until George could bear it no longer. He leapt from his seat and sprang to the window, which he opened. Leaning out, he surveyed the two disturbers of his peace with very little affection, but controlled himself sufficiently to say politely,—

"Would you mind not talking just here? I'm reading."

One of the two scowled up at him, and replied,—

"What business is it of yours where we talk?"

"Come on, Fisher," said the other, taking his arm; "let the man read if he wants; I suppose that's the poor beggar who's come to the 'trap.'"

"He's got a cool cheek of his own, whoever he is," retorted the indignant Fisher.

George was too relieved to be rid of their clatter under his window to trouble himself as to their sentiments towards himself, and he therefore once again settled down to work.

But now a new interruption occurred.

There arose a sudden rush of feet outside his door, a laughing and a cheering, in the midst of which he caught the following confused utterances:

"George's has bumped Corpus!" cried a voice.

(See Note 1.)

"Hurrah!" yelled half a dozen voices.

"It was the finest bit of rowing ever you saw," continued the first speaker. "Bailey put it on from the very first stroke, and was on the top of them before the Point."

And then the three cheers and yells rose again.

"You can fancy how black and blue Corpus looked—it's the biggest sell they've had for a long time."

Once more the shouts.

"And what do you think?" resumed the first speaker. "Old Bailey vows he won't come to the supper to-night. Did ever you hear of such an old bear?"

"He'll have to come," cried the rest; "let's waylay him here and carry him off."

"All serene," said the leader; "he's sure to come here—let's hang about on the stairs."

Oh, horrors! here were six noisy men going to establish themselves on the stairs over poor George's head, and remain there until their victim arrived, when, unless college traditions were utterly false, there would certainly be a battle royal. It was impossible, with the cheering and stamping and shouting and laughing, and scuffling overhead, to do a stroke of work, and yet George did his best. He pulled his table into the corner of the room farthest away from the noise, and, burying his head in

his hands, struggled desperately to abstract himself from the disturbance. But as sure as he succeeded for a minute, a clamour louder than ever would drive *every* idea out of his head. It was vain to attempt expostulation—what would these jubilant revellers care for a poor new man like him!—and he had nowhere else to go to escape them there was nothing for it but to be patient. In due time the victorious and unsuspecting Bailey, accompanied by four of his friends, appeared on the scene, and their approach was the immediate signal for action. With a cheer and a howl the ambush sprang upon their victims; and, with equal vehemence, these, having rapidly taken in the state of affairs, prepared to defend themselves. Poor George might as well have been sitting under Niagara. Step by step, the new-comers strove to force a passage up to Bailey's rooms, and step by step the opposing force strove to repulse them. The balustrades creaked, the ceiling of George's room quaked, and the walls thundered with the weight of conflicting bodies. The occupants of every room on the staircase turned out to see the fun, and on hearing of Bailey's contumacy, joined with his persecutors in refusing him the shelter of his own sanctuary. Bailey's party, on the other hand, was joined by reinforcements from without, who stormed up the stairs with the noise of an earthquake. The opposing forces soon became so great that the press of battle raged even to the door of George's study, which creaked and rattled as if every moment it were about to yield and admit the whole tide of conflict.

For half an hour the tumult roared and the battle swayed, and neither party gained nor yielded a foot.

Then suddenly from the confines of the battle rose and spread a cry of "Cave canem!" on which, as if by magic, the action was suspended, and retreating footsteps betokened a panic. A rally was sounded by Bailey's foes, but too late; the hero of the day had taken advantage of the momentary pause to dash past his persecutors and gain his study, and once there no force could dislodge him. The vanquished ones stormed and raged outside his door for another ten minutes, threatening all sorts of vengeance; then with three mighty cheers they struck camp and retired, leaving the staircase in peace.

Thus ended the famous battle of Bailey's Staircase, at the end of which George, with sunken spirits but indomitable resolution, sat down again to work.

For half an hour he made good progress, without let or hindrance, when—ah, cruel fate!—a wretch calling himself a man, in a neighbouring apartment, began to practise on the

ophicleide! At the first note George bounded from his seat as if he had been shot, and literally tore his hair. This was worse than all that had gone before. To one of his musical inspiration, the human voice divine in conversation was, endurable, and the roar of battle might even be tolerable, but to hear a creature attempt to play one of the "songs without words" on an instrument he knew as little of as the music he was parodying, was beyond all bearing! Then, if ever, did my wretched master dig his fingers into his ears, and writhe and shiver and groan at each discord produced by that inhuman performer. He retreated into the innermost recess of his bedroom; he even hid his unhappy head beneath the clothes, if haply he might escape the agony of this torture. But it was hopeless. The shrieks and groans of that brutal ophicleide would have penetrated the walls of the Tower of London.

It lasted, I should not like to say how long; and when it was over, the recollection of its horrors was almost as bad as their endurance. When George set himself again to work, it was with nerves unstrung and unutterable forebodings, yet still unconquered.

"At any rate," said he to himself, with a sigh, "there can't be anything worse than that—unless, indeed, he invites a friend like himself to practise duets with him!"

Happily this climax was not reached, and for one evening the worst of George Reader's persecutions had been suffered—but not the last.

By the time the last wail of the ophicleide had wriggled away into silence it was getting late, and the college was meditating retirement to rest. This operation was not got through, as may be imagined, without a good deal of clamour and a good deal of scuffling on the staircase, and a good deal of dialogue outside the window; but in due time silence reigned, and George congratulated himself that he had a quiet time at last before him.

Unlucky boast! Not an hour had passed, the lights in the windows round the courtyard had vanished, the distant shouts had ceased, and the footsteps on the pavement without had died away, when George was startled by a sound that seemed like the boring of a hole under his fireplace. The noise grew, and other similar noises rose in different parts. What was it? Surely the gay students of Saint George's were not about to effect an amateur burglary on the friendless owner of the "Mouse-trap?"

Nearer and nearer came the sounds, and George's heart beat loud. He closed his book and pushed his chair back from the table, ready to defend himself, on an emergency, to the bitter end. Then, under the hearth, there was a sound of scraping and grating, then a rushing noise, and then George saw—two enormous rats!

Loud and long laughed my master to himself at the discovery. What cared *he* for rats? He pulled his chair back to the table, and buried himself in his book for the next three hours, until his lamp began to burn low, and the letters on the pages grew blurred and dim, and the rats had scuffled back by the way they came, and my flagging hands pointed to four o'clock.

Then George Reader, after kneeling in silent prayer, went to bed.

Note 1. At the college races at Cambridge the boats start one behind the other at fixed distances, and any boat overtaking and "bumping" the one in front of it moves up a place nearer to the "Head of the River."

Chapter Twenty One.

How my master fared at Saint George's College and met an old acquaintance of the reader's there.

It is not my intention in these pages to give a full and particular account of George Reader's college life. It would neither be on the whole interesting, nor would it be found to have much bearing on my own career, which is the ostensible theme of the present veracious history.

Stories of college life have furnished amusing material for many a book before now, to which the reader must turn, should his curiosity in that direction require to be satisfied. The life of a hard—a too hard-working student in his cell under the college staircase is neither amusing nor sensational, and it is quite enough to say that, after his first eventful evening, George Reader pursued his studies with unflagging ardour, though with greater precaution than ever.

He soon discovered which hours of the day and night were most favourable for uninterrupted work.

He made a point of taking his constitutional during the hour made hideous by the ill-starred aspirant on the ophicleide. He invested in a trap for the rats, which, with the aid of his mother's cheese, yielded him a nightly harvest of victims, and he arranged with Benson, the "gyp," not to interrupt him, preferring rather to wait on himself—nay, even to dust out his own room—than have to sacrifice precious time while the same offices were being performed by another, especially by such an overpowering and awe-inspiring person as Benson.

So he set himself to work, attending lectures by day, reading every night into the small hours, spending scarcely anything, shrinking from all acquaintanceships, taking only a minimum of recreation, and living almost the life of a hermit, until I could see his cheeks grow pale, and his eyes dark round the rims, and feared for his health.

He treated me uniformly well. Of course, as the gift of his fellow-villagers, he prized me highly, but by no means consigned me to the stately repose of a purely ornamental treasure. I lay nightly beside his elbow on the table, and counted for him the hours as they sped from night to morning. I lay beneath his pillow at night, and helped him to rise betimes. I insured his punctual attendance at lectures, and drove him home from his scanty walks in the fresh air more quickly than I myself would have cared to do if I could have helped it. In short, I found myself in the satisfactory position of one thoroughly useful in his sphere of life, and on the whole, though my first young master returned constantly to my thoughts, I contrived to be very happy in my new capacity.

Two events, however, both of a pleasant nature, served to vary the monotony of George's second term at college. The first of these was a visit from his friend and patron, Dr Wilkins, the rector of Muggerbridge.

George was sitting at his modest breakfast one morning, when his door suddenly opened, and the well-known and beloved face of his old tutor lit up the apartment.

My master sprang to his feet, and with unaffected joy rushed forward to welcome his guest, before it had do much as occurred to him into what uninviting quarters he was receiving him.

"How good of you to come, sir!" he cried. "I never expected such happiness."

"You don't suppose I should go through Cambridge and never beat up your quarters, my boy! But, dear me, how ill you are looking!"

"Am I? I don't feel ill."

"Humph! you're overdoing it. But aren't you going to offer me some breakfast?"

George coloured, and his spirits sank as his eyes fell on the scanty fare of which he himself had been partaking.

"It's only bread-and-butter," he said.

"And what better?" said Dr Wilkins, sitting down; "and I warrant the butter's good if it's your mother's making."

"So it is," said George, beginning to recover his spirits. "And how did you leave them at home, sir?"

"First-rate, my boy;—looking much better than you are. And so this is your den? Well, it's—"

"Nothing very grand," put in George.

"Exactly, nothing very grand; but I dare say you find it as good a place to read in as a drawing-room, eh? Now tell me all about yourself, my boy, while I drink this good tea of yours."

And George, with light heart and beaming face, told his good friend of all his doings, his hardships, his difficulties, his triumphs, and his ambitions.

And Dr Wilkins sat and listened with pride and thankfulness at heart, to find his young *protégé* the same earnest, unaffected boy he had parted with from Muggerbridge six months before. They talked for a long time that morning. The tutor and boy passed in review all the work hitherto accomplished and discussed the programme of future study. Many were the wholesome counsels the elder gave to the younger, and many were the new hopes and resolutions which filled the lad's heart as he opened all his soul to his good friend.

"And now," said Dr Wilkins, "I want you to take me to see your college and chapel."

George looked perplexed. Who was *he* to conduct a Doctor of Divinity over his college. Such a hermit's life had he led that he hardly knew the ins and outs of the place himself, and there was not a single man in the college to whom he was not a stranger.

"I'm afraid you've chosen a bad guide," faltered he. "I don't know any of the men, and very little of the place."

"Oh, never mind that," said the doctor; "it will be all the more interesting to make a tour of discovery, so come along!"

George put on his cap and gown and obeyed. For a moment he wished the gown had been long enough to conceal the patch on the knee of his trousers, but the next he laughed at himself for his vanity.

"There's nothing to be ashamed of," thought he, "and if it *is* patched—well, it is."

And thus consoling himself, he accompanied the doctor across the quadrangle.

Men certainly did stare at him as he passed, and some of them deemed him a queer "specimen," and others wondered what Saint George's was coming to. But my master, if he noticed their looks, disregarded them, and as for Dr Wilkins, he smiled to himself to think how prone mankind is to judge by appearances.

"Unless I mistake," mused he to himself, "these young sparks of Saint George's will some day think fit to be proud of their poor fellow-collegian."

The two made the tour of the college, and finished up with the grand old Gothic chapel. It was easy to guess why George's face lit up as he approached the place. The deep notes of an organ were sounding across the quadrangle, and as they entered the door a flood of harmony swept towards them down the long aisles. Dr Wilkins could feel the boy's arm tremble, and heard the sigh of delight which escaped his lips. Without a word they sat in the nearest stalls, and listened while the music went on. How it rose and fell, how it trembled in the oak arches of the roof, and swept through the choir down to where they sat! It was only an ordinary organist's practice; but to George, after his hard work, and with the memories of home revived by the presence of his dear tutor, it came as a breath from heaven.

Daily, nearly, had he heard that organ since his coming to Cambridge, but never had it delighted him as it did now.

“Can we see the organ?” he said, when the last chord had died away.

“Let us try,” said the doctor.

The gallery door was open, and ascending the stairs to the organ loft, they found the organist preparing to depart.

“We have been a clandestine audience,” said the doctor, “and couldn’t help coming to thank you for the treat you have given us. My young friend here is music mad.”

The organist smiled.

“You took me at a disadvantage,” he said, “I was only amusing myself.”

“Whatever you were doing for yourself, you delighted us,” said the doctor.

“Would you like to try the organ?” presently said the organist to George.

Oh, what a bound of delight I could feel in my master’s breast at the invitation.

“May I?” he exclaimed.

“Certainly, if you like—and if you can,” added the other, hesitatingly, as if not sure whether the lad’s skill would be equal to his enthusiasm.

George sat down on the bench, and laid his fingers lovingly on the keys. But he withdrew them before he had sounded a note. “I would rather you did not watch me too closely,” he said, nervously, “for I am only a beginner.”

“Let us go and sit down stairs,” suggested the doctor.

The organist looked still more doubtful than before, and began to repent his offer. However, he retired with the doctor, and made up his mind to be excruciated. They sat down in two of the stalls and waited.

And then George began to play. What he played I cannot tell. It began first in a faint whisper of music which swelled onward into a pure choral melody. Then suddenly the grand old roof trembled with the clash of a martial movement, strong and steady, which carried the listener onward till he was, with the sound, lost in the far distance. Then, in wailing minor numbers the music returned, slowly working itself up into the tumult and fury of a pent-up agony, and finally sweeping all before it in a wild hurricane of bitterness. Then a pause, and then sweetly and in the far distance once more rose the quiet hymn, and after that all was silence.

After the first few notes the organist had uttered a startled ejaculation, and drawn the doctor to another seat farther down the nave, where, till all was over, he sat motionless as a statue. But the moment the music had ceased he ran up the stairs with a face full of pleasure and admiration, and actually seized George by the hand.

"You're a genius, sir. That was not at all bad, I can tell you."

A happy smile was all the answer George could give.

"Not at all bad," repeated the organist. "I was telling your friend," added he to Dr Wilkins, who had returned more slowly to the organ, "that was not at all bad. He must come here often."

"Nothing, I am sure, would delight him more," said the doctor. "Eh, my boy?"

"Nothing, indeed," said George, "but—"

"But your reading, I suppose."

"Never mind your reading, sir!" exclaimed the organist. "What's that to music? Take my advice, and go in for music."

Poor George! for a moment he felt tempted to abandon all his ambitions and resolutions at the prospect of a career so delightful and congenial.

But he was made of firmer stuff than Tom Drift, and replied,—

"I cannot do that, sir; but if I may come now and then—"

"Come whenever you like," said the organist; and so saying he shook George and his friend by the hand, and hurried from the chapel.

This was the event which of all others brightened George Reader's first year at college.

Instead of aimless walks, he now stole at every spare moment (without cutting into his ordinary work) to the organ, and there revelled in music.

His acquaintance with the college organist increased and developed into a friendship, of which mutual admiration formed a large element, and one happy Sunday, a year after his arrival at Cambridge, he received, for the first time, the much coveted permission to preside at the organ during a college service, a task of which he acquitted himself so well—nay, so remarkably well—that not only did he frequently find himself again in the same position, but his playing came to be a matter of remark among the musical set of Saint George's.

"Who is the fellow who played to-day?" a man inquired one day of the organist; "is he a pupil of yours?"

"No. I might be a pupil of his in some things. He's a boy, and, mark my words, if he goes on as he's begun he'll be heard of some day."

"What's his name, do you know?" inquired the youth.

"I don't even know that, I never— Here he comes!"

"Introduce me, will you?"

"With pleasure. Allow me to introduce Mr Halliday," said the organist to George.

Halliday! Wasn't that a familiar name to me? Was it possible? This fine fellow, then, was no other than Jim Halliday, whom I had last seen as a boy on the steps of Randlebury, with his chum Charlie Newcome, waving farewell to Tom Drift.

Ah, how my heart beat at being thus once more brought back into the light of those happy days by this unexpected meeting!

My master by no means shared my delight at the incident. He had always shrunk from acquaintanceships among his fellow-collegians. With none, hitherto, but the organist had he become

familiar, and that only by virtue of an irresistible common interest. His poverty and humble station forbade him to intrude his fellowship on the clannish gentry of Saint George's, and certainly his cravings for hard study led him, so far from considering the exclusion as a hardship, to look upon it as a mercy, and few things he desired more devoutly than that this satisfactory state of affairs might continue.

I do not say George was right in this. Sociability is, to a certain extent, a duty, and one that ought not without the soundest reason to be shirked. George may have carried his reserve rather too far, but at any rate you will allow he erred on the right side, if he erred at all, and carried his purpose through with more honesty and success than poor Tom Drift had displayed in a very similar situation.

Now, however, his hermitage was in peril of a siege, and he quailed as he acknowledged the introduction offered him.

"How are you?" said Halliday, with all his own downrightness. "I and a lot of fellows have liked your playing, and I don't see why I shouldn't tell you so. How are you?"

"I'm quite well, thank you," faltered George.

"You're a freshman, I suppose?" asked Jim.

"No, I'm in my second year."

"Are you? I thought I knew all the men in the college; but perhaps you live in the town?"

"No, I live in college."

"Where are your rooms?" asked the astonished Jim.

"In, or rather under, H staircase," replied George. "Perhaps you would know the place best as the 'Mouse-trap.'"

Jim could not resist a whistle of surprise and a rapid scrutiny of his new acquaintance.

"The 'Mouse-trap'! That's an awful hole, isn't it?"

"Yes," said George, his candour coming to his rescue to deliver him from this cross-examination, "but it's cheap—"

Jim looked as afflicted as if he had been seized with a sudden toothache.

"What a blundering jackass I am! Please excuse my rudeness; I never meant to annoy you."

"You have not done so. You are not the sort of man I should mind knowing I was poor—"

"Of course not; so am I poor; but don't let's talk of that. Will you come to my rooms?"

George hesitated, and then answered,—

"I'd rather not, please. I'm reading hard, and, besides—"

"Besides what?"

"I've no right to expect you to associate with me."

"Why *ever* not?"

"I may as well tell you straight out. My father is a gamekeeper, and I am a gamekeeper's son."

Jim laughed pleasantly.

"Well, really your logic is perfect, but I can't say as much for your sense. Bless you, man, aren't we all of us lineal descendants of a gardener? Come along!"

"Please excuse me," again faltered George; "you are very kind, but your friends may not thank you for—"

"My friends!—oh, yes!" blurted out Jim. "What on earth business have they to put their noses into my affairs. Like their impudence, all of them!"

Jim, you will see, was still a boy, though he had whiskers.

"Don't blame them till they have offended. Anyhow, Mr Halliday, please excuse me. I want to read, and have made a rule never to go out."

"Look here—what's your name?" began Jim.

"Reader," replied my master.

"Reader! Are you the fellow who's in for the Wigram Scholarship?" cried Jim, in astonishment.

"Yes," replied George; "how did you know?"

"Only that some of the fellows are backing you for winner."

George laughed. "They'll be disappointed," he said.

"I hope not," said Jim, "for if you get it you'll be free of the college, and get into rather better quarters than the 'Mouse-trap.' But look here, Reader, do come to my rooms, there's a good fellow; if *you* don't want any friends, don't prevent my having one."

This was irresistible, and George had nothing for it but to yield, and with many misgivings to accompany his new friend.

Chapter Twenty Two.

How my master and I went out to breakfast, and whom we met.

Jim Halliday—now a strapping youth of nineteen—was a good representative of the "steady set" at Saint George's College. Indeed, as he was intending to become a clergyman in due time, it would have been a deplorable thing if this had not been the case. He worked hard, and though not a clever fellow, had already taken a good position in the examination lists of his college. He was also an ardent superintendent at a certain ragged-school in the town conducted by University men; and was further becoming a well-known figure in the debates at the Union—on all which accounts his friends were not a little satisfied. But on one point Jim and his friends did not hit it. Ever since his Randlebury days he had kept up his passion for athletic sports, and if he had now been famous for nothing else at his college, he would at least have been noted as a good bat, a famous boxer, a desperate man in a football scrimmage, and a splendid oar. It was on this subject that Jim and his relations were at variance. When I speak of "relations" I refer, by the way, to a certain old-fashioned uncle and aunt in Cornwall, who since Jim's father's death had assumed the guardianship of that youth and his brothers and sisters. This good uncle and aunt were horribly shocked that one destined for so solemn a sphere in life as the ministry should profane himself with athletic

sports. The matter formed the theme for many serious remonstrances, and long letters addressed to the depraved Jim, who, on his part, maintained his side of the argument with characteristic vehemence. He actually spent a whole day in the college library, making out a list of all the athletic divines in history since the creation of the world, the which he hurled triumphantly at his good relations' heads as an unanswerable challenge. But, however satisfactory it may have been to Jim, it failed to convince them, and neither party being disposed to give in, the feud in this particular had become chronic.

All this Jim contrived to impart to George (for lack of better conversation) in the course of a short walk previous to the breakfast in his rooms, to which he was leading his new acquaintance a captive.

"I suppose we shall have it all opened again now," he remarked, "for you may have seen that my name is down to play in the football-match against Sandhurst."

"I never read the athletic intelligence in the papers," said George.

"Well, my uncle and aunt do. The names were actually printed in the *Times*, and I shall be greatly surprised if I don't find a letter or telegram when I get back to my rooms. We may as well beat to quarters, though, or the fellows will be waiting."

"You didn't tell me anyone else was to be there," said George reproachfully, suddenly stopping short, "I can't come!"

"Stuff and nonsense," said Jim; "they won't eat you!"

"Halliday," said George, hurriedly, "I'm much obliged to you for asking me, but I have made a rule, as I tell you, never to go out, and I've told you the reason."

"An utterly rubbishing reason!" put in Jim.

"I promised to come with you because I thought there would be only us two; but I really can't come if there are more."

"My dear fellow," said Jim good-humouredly, "anyone else would be offended with you. Why, you're a regular bear."

"I know it's very rude of me," said George, feeling and looking very uncomfortable, "and I don't want to be that."

"Of course you don't; so come along. Why, my dear fellow, one would think my friends were all as abandoned wretches as I am, by the manner in which you shrink from the notion of meeting them, but they aren't."

"Do let me off," put in George, in despair.

"Not a bit of it. But I tell you what, if you don't like them or me—"

"It's not that, you know, but I've no right to associ—"

"Associate with your grandmother! Come this once, and I'll never ask you again unless you like, there!"

"Who are the fellows?" asked George.

"Two of them are College men—very nice men, in my humble opinion; and, now I come to think of it, one of them, Clarke, is in against you for the 'Wigram,' but everyone says you're safe; and the third is an old particular school chum, who is playing in Sandhurst team against us, and whom it is therefore my interest to incapacitate by a howling breakfast."

George laughed.

"I wish you'd let him eat my share as well."

"I dare say he would be equal to the occasion. Newcome was always a good trencherman."

At the name I bounded nearly out of my master's pocket. Newcome! an old school chum of Jim Halliday's. It must be my old master! And—yes—now I remembered, he had spoken in one of his letters to Tom Drift of going to Sandhurst Military College. It must be he. How I longed for my master to make up his mind and go to the breakfast!

"But I wouldn't have you miss seeing him," said Jim, "for I'm no end proud of him; and when you've once seen him, you'll have seen the best fellow going. That is," added he, "present company of course excepted."

"I'm sure he's a nice man."

"Nice! Of course, and therefore fit company for you and me; so come along, old man. I never had such hard work inviting a man to breakfast in all my life."

"I'm certain I'm ill-mannered," said George, "but I won't hold out any more. You will—"

"Hurrah, that's settled, and here we are, too!"

With that he led the way up a staircase, on the second floor of which he opened a door, and ushered George into his rooms. No one was there yet, and there was consequently time to look about. Jim's rooms were nothing very grand, but they were palatial compared with the "Mouse-trap." Cheerful and well-lighted, with a pleasant look-out into the old quadrangle, comfortably furnished, further enlivened with all those adornments in the shape of swords, fencing-sticks, dumb-bells, etcetera, without which no model undergraduate's rooms would be complete.

George could hardly help sighing as his thoughts flew back to his own dingy cell under "H" staircase.

"Lay another plate, Smith," said Jim, addressing his "gyp"; "and now, old man, make yourself comfortable."

And then the host, in a business-like way, devoted himself to the mysteries of coffee-making and egg-boiling, in the midst of which occupation Clarke and the other Saint George's man arrived.

George felt very miserable on being introduced and devoutly hoped the fellows would have sufficient to converse about among themselves, without it being needful for him to come under observation. This reserve, however, he was not destined to maintain for very long.

"Halliday," said Clarke, "were you in chapel this morning?"

"Yes."

"Well, did you ever hear the organ so grandly played?"

George blushed deeply, half with pleasure at this genuine compliment, and half with nervousness at the turn the talk was taking.

"And it wasn't the regular organist," said Clarke's friend, "for I saw *him* downstairs."

"No, it's some fellow—plough-boy or stable-boy; or somebody he's got hold of, so I heard. Whoever he is, he knows how to play."

At this point Jim was as red in the face as George, and equally embarrassed.

"Is the fellow at college, do you know?" asked Clarke's friend.

"I believe so, in fact—"

"In fact," broke out Jim, in fear of further awkwardness, "in fact the gentleman you are speaking of is my friend here."

If Clarke and his friend had suddenly been confronted by a tribe of wild Indians they could not have been more taken aback than they were at this announcement. In fact, it was an awkward moment for everybody. Nobody knew exactly what to say, or which way to look. But a welcome interruption arrived.

My heart beat suddenly as I heard at the bottom of the stairs a sound. Some one was coming up two steps at a time. Nearer and nearer the light feet came, and my agitation told me whom they brought.

There was a rap at the door, a click on the latch, and then, after all these years, I saw once more my dear first master, Charlie Newcome. Little he guessed I was so near him!

He had spent the previous day with Jim, and was therefore no stranger in his rooms; indeed, from the moment he entered them, he appeared as much at home there as their own master. He greeted the visitors pleasantly, and then, in the old Randlebury style, demanded if breakfast was anywhere near ready, as he was starving.

He had the beginnings of a fierce moustache, he stood six feet high in his boots, and there was a look of power about him which exceeded even the promise of his Randlebury days. Otherwise he was the same. He had the same clear, honest eyes, the same frank smile, the same merry laugh, for which everyone had loved him then; and as I looked at him and rejoiced, I felt I would give the world to be back in my old place in his pocket.

Jim, as he himself had said, was proud enough of his friend, and no wonder. His arrival, too, at the instant when it occurred, was most opportune, and made him a specially welcome addition to

our party, which, including my master, was very soon on the best of terms round the hospitable Jim's table.

"It's not often," said that worthy, "one gets two pairs of deadly enemies eating out of the same dish."

"What's the fellow talking about?" asked Charlie, passing up his plate for more steak.

"Well," said Jim, "you and I are, or shall be, deadly enemies to-day, old man."

"Rather," responded Charlie; "so much the worse for you. But where's the other pair?"

"Why, Clarke and Reader."

"I?" exclaimed Clarke, in an alarmed tone. "I hope Mr Reader and I are not at enmity?"

"Oh, yes, you are; don't you know Reader's the fellow in against you for the 'Wigram'?" said Jim.

Clarke was astonished. He had been told there was another candidate for the scholarship, who in some quarters was considered a formidable opponent, but he had never fairly realised the fact till now.

"I'm very glad to meet you," said he, courteously, to George, "though I can hardly wish you as much success in your exam, as I dare say you wish yourself."

"I hope I shall not break my heart if I lose," replied George. "Are we the only two in for it?"

And then they fell to talking about their approaching struggle, during which I gave heed to a hurried talk between Charlie and Jim.

"Do you remember Tom Drift?" asked Jim.

Charlie's face at once became serious as he replied, "How could I forget him? What about him?"

"Why," said Jim, "I had a letter from my brother Joe the other day, and he says Tom has altogether gone to the bad. He met him drunk coming out of some slum in Holborn, and followed him for a long time in hopes of being able to speak to him, but

the fellow couldn't, or wouldn't recognise him, and only swore. He is living at some disreputable lodging-house—"

"Where?" exclaimed Charlie, excitedly.

"I don't know. Why! what's the matter?"

"Can you find out his address?" asked Charlie.

"I dare say. Why do you want it?"

"Because I must go and see him. Could you find out to-day by telegram?"

"I'll try." Presently he added, "I could never make out why you stuck to the fellow as you did, old man, especially when he turned against you. You're a better man than ever I shall be."

"Nonsense! I promised once to be his friend, that's all. Do send the telegram soon. And now tell me who's the pale man talking to Clarke?"

"A fellow called Reader—one of the cleverest men we've got."

"He looks half-starved!"

"Yes; I'm afraid he's—I mean, I don't think he takes proper care of himself."

"Pity," said Charlie. "I say, old man, this is rare steak! Give us a bit more. What time does the match begin?"

"At two. You old beggar! see if I don't pay off some old scores before the day's over."

"I thought you told me once your people didn't fancy your going in for athletics?"

"No more they do. I expect a stinger by this post; but I shall not open it till after the match. What matches we used to have at Randlebury!"

"Didn't we!"

"And do you remember what an ass you used to make of yourself over that precious silver watch of yours?"

It did one good to hear the laugh with which Charlie greeted this reminder.

"I'd give my repeater, and a ten-pound note besides, to get back that old watch," said he. (If he had but known!) "But there's no knowing where it is now; poor Tom Drift must have parted with it years ago."

With such talk the meal proceeded, and presently the conversation grew more general, and branched out on to all sorts of topics. George, having got over the first strangeness of finding himself in society, found it not so bad after all; and, indeed, he very soon amazed himself by the amount he talked. It was a new world to him, the hermit of the "Mouse-trap," to find himself exchanging ideas with men of his own intellectual standing; and he certainly forgave Jim his persistency in compelling his company this morning. He forgot the patches in his clothes among such gentlemen as Clarke and Charlie, and for the first time in his life felt himself superior to his natural diffidence and reserve. Who could help being at his ease where Charlie was? He kept up a running fire of chaff at his old schoolfellow, for which occasionally the others came in; and if it be true that laughter is a good digestive, Jim Halliday's breakfast that morning must have agreed with the five who partook of it.

"Who's this coming?" suddenly exclaimed the latter, as there came a sound of footsteps slowly ascending the stairs.

"Two of them!" said Charlie. "Perhaps it's your tailor and your hatter with their little bills."

"Whoever it is, they're blowing hard," said Clarke.

"They don't enjoy my 'Gradus at Parnassum,'" said Jim. "Come in, all of you!" he shouted.

The door opened slowly, and there appeared to the astonished eyes of Jim and his party a grave middle-aged gentleman and still more grave and middle-aged lady.

"Oh, my prophetic soul! my uncle and aunt!" groaned Jim.

Chapter Twenty Three.

How Jim’s uncle and aunt spent a different sort of day from that which they had expected.

The apparition was indeed none other than Jim Halliday’s dreaded uncle and aunt, and the object of their visit was easy to guess. They had, in fact, taken the long journey from Cornwall as fast as express trains could bring them, in order to remonstrate personally with their depraved nephew on the error of his ways.

They were evidently as astonished to find Jim’s room full of visitors, as Jim on his part was to see them, and they looked so taken aback and disconcerted that the party at once rose, and offered to take their leave. Clarke and his friend actually did depart, but Jim still had presence of mind enough left to groan out an entreaty to Charlie and my master that they would remain—an appeal so pathetic that there was no resisting it.

Charlie politely handed the good people to chairs, while Jim, under cover of preparing a second edition of breakfast, hastily arranged his plan of defence.

“Reader,” he whispered to my master, “whatever you do, keep the talk going, old man, or it’s all U P.” Then turning to his relatives, he broke out,—

“This *is* a surprise! How are you both? Upon my word, you’re looking grandly. How kind to come and see me up here! Will you allow me to introduce my two friends, Ensign Newcome and Mr Reader? My uncle and aunt, gentlemen.”

The uncle and aunt bowed gravely, and in a frightened sort of way, in acknowledgment of the courteous greeting of the two young men. It was clear they had expected to find Jim alone, and over a quiet cup of cocoa to reduce him to a sense of his wickedness. It put them out of their reckoning, quite, to find that, if they were to open fire at once, it would have to be in the presence of these two gentlemanly and rather imposing strangers. However, they were too full of their mission to delay, and so the uncle began,—

“It will be as well, James, that I should state to you—”

“Not a word now, till you’ve had some breakfast,” interrupted the wary Jim. “My poor dear aunt must be simply fagged to death. Do take your bonnet off, and come and sit here in the easy-chair. Let me make you some cocoa; I know the way you

take it, exactly. Try those chops in front of you, sir, they are prime, as Charlie will tell you. Reader, old man, draw in and keep us company. Well, I declare, this *is* a jolly family party! And what's the news down in your part of the world? Have you had a good harvest? My uncle comes from Cornwall, Charlie."

And he gave his friend a lugubrious wink, as much as to say, "Keep it up."

"Do you live near the sea?" thereupon began Charlie.

"Pretty near, that is, about twenty miles off," said the uncle, looking at Charlie under his spectacles.

"My love, the gentleman will laugh at you," said his good lady. "I call twenty miles a long way."

"I perfectly agree with you, ma'am," said Charlie, "Twenty miles is a good distance in this little island of ours. But it's curious how little they make of such a distance in a big country like India, for instance, where I am going. There, I am told, it is quite a common thing for a man to be twenty miles from his next-door neighbour, and yet be on constant visiting terms."

"Dear me!" said the uncle.

"You don't know India, I suppose, sir?" inquired Charlie.

"No; that is—"

"He's only read about it in books," again put in the aunt; "and so, my love, you'd better say at once you don't know anything about it."

"Well," said Charlie, "it depends a good deal on the books. Some books of travel are so vivid one almost seems to be in the country they describe.

"Er—what did you say, Reader?"

Reader was quick enough to take this broad hint, and keep up the talk.

"To my mind, the most interesting books are those which describe, not so much places, as people and their manners. There are a great many books of this kind about India. One I lately read was specially interesting."

And then, to Jim's unbounded delight and gratitude, George began calmly to give a review a quarter of an hour long of the work in question for the benefit of the two old people, who, as they listened, became more and more impressed with the importance of their nephew's friend, and of the impossibility of obtruding their special grievance on the party at the present time. Indeed, the aunt had almost forgotten the speech with which she had come prepared, in her pleasure at hearing the young men talk, and she even joined in the conversation in a manner which showed how she enjoyed it. The uncle was still gloomy, and appeared to be waiting the first favourable opportunity for "coming to the point."

The opportunity, however, never occurred. After a long and lively talk on all sorts of matters, Jim adroitly turned the conversation on to the subject of athletics by appealing to his uncle to add his voice to that of Reader's other friends in rebuking him for never taking any exercise.

"Look at his pale face!" he exclaimed; "isn't it a disgrace?"

George bore this attack good-naturedly, and began to excuse himself; but the uncle, who had not before noticed his looks, interrupted him by saying,—

"Pardon me, sir, but I quite agree with James. If is very wrong to cultivate the brain at the expense of the body."

This observation brought down Charlie's hearty approval, who forthwith launched into a rhapsody on athletic sports—particularly football—appealing in every sentence to the uncle, who now found himself fairly in the toils.

"If it were for nothing more than the moral training it gives a man," said Charlie—"for the pluck, manliness, and endurance it puts into him—we couldn't over-estimate the value of athletics; could we, sir?"

"No—er—that is to say—"

"Why, look at Jim, here! Upon my word, sir, if you'll excuse me saying it, it does you the greatest credit the way he has been brought up to value healthy exercise. Why, there are some parents and guardians who, instead of encouraging that sort of thing, would positively so far wrong their sons as to forbid it. I can't make out that sort of training, can you?"

"Eh? Well, possibly not," faltered the uncle, turning very red.

"Of course not, and you'll have your reward in seeing Jim turn out a far better clergyman than your mollycoddles, who don't know the way to look their fellow-men straight in the face. Jim, old man, you've had my cup up there ten minutes; hand it up."

Jim filled it to overflowing, as a token, perhaps, of the gratitude of his heart towards his champion, and forthwith handed it up.

"And *à propos* of that," pursued Charlie, having gulped down his coffee, "you are just come up here in the nick of time, for there's a glorious football-match on to-day—"

The uncle groaned and the aunt fidgeted.

"In which Jim is playing, and no one deserves the honour better. You must come and see it by all means. Eh, Jim?"

"Rather," said Jim; "it would never do to miss it, especially as Newcome is playing against us. The worst of it is, as we are both engaged, there will be no one to pilot you about."

"I shall be very glad," said Reader—though, if truth must be told, his politeness cost him an effort—"if your uncle and aunt will let me. I'm almost as great a stranger, though, in the town as they are."

"You are very kind, sir," said Jim's aunt, who had been long since gained over by the enemy. "We shall be most pleased to have your escort. Eh, my love? Besides, we shall help to keep you out in the fresh air for once. But, James," she said, "I can't get over you and Mr Newcome being opponents in this match and yet such friends."

Every one laughed at this, and Charlie confided to the good lady his fixed determination of breaking her nephew's legs before the day was out—a purpose which, from the speaker's point of view, she could not help admitting was a laudable one.

Thus the breakfast ended very satisfactorily for everyone except the uncle, who had at last discovered the trap into which he had let himself fall, from which, however, he could not with grace free himself.

Three hours later the two worthies, having seen many of the sights of Cambridge with the advantage of Reader's escort, found themselves with some hundreds of other spectators on the field in which the notable football-match of Cambridge *versus* Sandhurst was immediately about to begin.

Jim Halliday's uncle and aunt could hardly have denied that the thirty young men, half of them in blue jerseys and half in red, who were now strolling out onto the ground, were as fine a body of youths as one could easily encounter in the course of a long day's march. The picture of health and physique, they seemed almost like some of those heroes of old beside whom poor everyday man was wont to shrink into insignificance. Among the blues towered Jim, among the reds Charlie, two by no means the least noble-looking of the company.

"How well James looks in that dress, my love!" said the aunt.

"My love" could hardly dispute the fact, so he said nothing; but in his secret heart he began to doubt whether he had not taken an exaggerated view of the demoralising nature of athletic sports.

Play was soon ordered, and then amidst breathless silence the ball shot upward, propelled by the vigorous kick of the Sandhurst captain.

It is not my purpose to follow in all its details the famous match of which I was that day spectator. My muse has other things to sing of besides rallies and charges, scrimmages and drop kicks, touch-downs and passings. To me the game was chiefly interesting as it was interesting to Jim Halliday and Charlie Newcome; but as during the first part of the match both these worthies were what they would call "out of it"—that is, on outpost duty—I found the company I was in better worth studying than the ups and downs of the football.

When the game first began the two good people gazed in silent astonishment. It always takes some time to understand the humour of a football-match from outside, and Jim's uncle and aunt consequently for a time could make nothing out of the constant succession of charges and scrimmages of which they were witnesses. Presently, however, with the aid of their own observation and the remarks of people around them, they came to appreciate the sport better, and grew proportionately interested. After a time the interest grew to excitement and excitement found relief in speech.

"There's that little red-haired fellow got it again!" exclaimed the aunt; "see how he runs!"

"Wait a bit!" cried the uncle; "that fellow there will catch him—no, he hasn't—just look at him; there's smartness for you! Ah! he's down!"

"But another of the blues has got the ball!" cried the aunt, starting on tiptoe. "Well, to be sure! five onto one! what a shame!"

And so they kept up a running commentary on the fortunes of the game, much to George's amusement and that of those near us. Now and then the uncle appeared suddenly to recollect himself, and would come out with a grunt of disapproval. Once, for instance, when by a sort of common impulse the whole of the players engaged in one of the scrimmages fell to the ground, he was hardy enough to ejaculate—

"Disgraceful!"

"Hold your tongue, my love," broke in his wife; "you know very well you'd like to be in it yourself if you were a boy. *I* would!"

After that the uncle, whatever he thought, said nothing.

The sides appeared to be very evenly matched; so much so, that when "half-time" was called neither had gained the least advantage.

Just as the sides were changing over, preparing to renew the contest, a man came running up to where our party stood and called out,—

"Will anyone lend me a watch? Mine has stopped." This man was the timekeeper for Cambridge, and indeed was no other than Clarke's friend, one of the breakfast-party that morning.

"Here is one!" cried George, recognising him and unfastening me from his ribbon-chain. The next moment I was hurrying towards the goals in my borrower's hands.

I had now nothing for it but to attend closely to the game, for the old gentleman and lady were too far away for me to be able to observe them any further.

The ball was started again, and I had the satisfaction of seeing that both Jim and Charlie were in new posts, which promised a better chance of sport.

And so it happened.

Hardly had the first scrimmage been formed when Jim was seen slipping out of it with the ball under his arm, making straight for the Sandhurst goal. He was quickly stopped, however, and after

a desperate encounter the ball got free and rolled out of the crush towards where Charlie stood.

He, not waiting to pick it up, went at it with a flying kick. Up flew the ball, amid cheers and shouts, right over the heads of the players, and had it not been for the promptitude of the Cambridge "backs" it might have got behind their goal. And now, as if every one knew the time was getting short, the play became harder than ever. Many a time did I catch sight of my two Randlebury friends in the thick of the fight, sometimes hand to hand, sometimes separated by a living wall of humanity, but always doing their work, and straining for the one object. The time went on. The man who held me looked at me now oftener than he had done hitherto; and presently, when I pointed to five minutes to four, he cried out to a player near him, "Five minutes more."

That player was Charlie Newcome, and I saw his face flush as of old, and knew he at any rate intended to make the most of the brief time remaining.

But two of the minutes were gone before his chance came. Then there was a cry, and all eyes turned towards him, for there came the ball flying straight to where he stood. In a moment he had it, and started to run. It was a desperate chance, but Charlie was ready for desperate deeds. Shout rose on shout, and cheer on cheer, as first one, then another of the enemy was overturned or dodged. The more he achieved, the less his enemies ventured against him, and he dashed through their "forwards" and between their "quarter-backs." Next moment, with a mighty swoop, their "half-back" fell to the earth.

And now there are but two men to pass, and one of these is Jim Halliday. The avenging host follows in hot haste behind, but the issue of the fight lies with these two. See the grin of joy on Jim's face as he throws away his cap, and watches his dear enemy advance! It was as if a trumpet-call had suddenly sounded in the ears of two old chargers, and to them that moment the world was all contained in the space which severed them. Straight as an arrow rushed Charlie, firm as a rock waited Jim. Nor had he long to wait. With a bound and a howl his enemy leapt at him, and next moment the two were locked in an embrace the shock of which even I could distinctly hear. Oh, shades of Randlebury I did your school every turn out two finer men than this pair of struggling, straining, rival friends! The collision occurred close to the goal-line, and a moment afterwards a cry of "Maul!" proclaimed that they had in their struggle crossed the line, and that consequently (in accordance

with the law of the game) the contest for the ball must be decided by these two alone, without aid or hindrance from the breathless friends and foes who stood round. A fair field and no favour! A ring was formed, and as my heart beat rapidly on towards the critical moment, these two strained every nerve to get the advantage for his side before "time" should be called.

"Bravo, our man!" cried one. "Stick to it, Newcome!" shouted others. "Now you have it, Halliday!" called out a third. Never was duel before the walls of Troy more desperate. The crowd burst in onto the field and thronged round, foremost among whom Jim's aunt's voice was heard crying out shrilly,—

"Well, I never, it's James and Mr Newcome, my love. How hot they are!"

It was evident the contest in which the two youths were engaged was one not destined to end before time was up. I pointed to within half a minute of the fated hour—and it would take far longer than that for even so powerful a champion as Jim to wrest the ball from Charlie's defiant grasp. The timekeeper turned away from the rivals and held me up. On went my hand, and on went the struggle.

"Now, Newcome; one tug more?"

"Bravo, our man! You'll do it yet!"

"Time's up! No side!"

Then rose those two from the earth, and immediately the astonished Jim felt himself embraced before the whole multitude by his aunt.

"Well, James, and how do you feel after it all?"

"Hungry," replied Jim.

So ended the famous match. After that Jim had no more trouble from his uncle and aunt on the subject of athletics, which they were fain to admit were a branch of science beyond their comprehension.

Charlie started that same night for London, with the intention of making one more effort to help Tom Drift at all hazards. I, meanwhile, was restored to the possession of my lawful owner, who returned to his studies in the "Mouse-trap"; sitting up all night, I am sorry to say, to make up for the loss of the day.

Chapter Twenty Four.

How George Reader went up for his final examination and left me behind him.

"Old man, you're overdoing it!"

These words were uttered by Jim Halliday, one evening two years after the events related in our last chapter, to his friend George Reader, as the two sat together in Jim's rooms at Saint George's.

Time had wrought changes with both. My master had secured the scholarship for which he had worked so hard during his first year's residence, and no longer inhabited the "Mouse-trap." His present quarters were the rooms immediately above those in which he was at this moment sitting, and it is hardly necessary to say that the two friends were constantly in one another's society. George, though still retaining much of his shyness, had made many acquaintances at his college, but Jim was his only friend. The two had their meals together, attended lectures together, worked together, and, though a greater contrast in all respects could hardly have been possible, were fairly inseparable.

At the present moment they were both working hard for the grand Tripos examination which was to close their college career. Every one said George would stand high in this, and Jim (since he had taken to hard reading) was expected to pass too, though how, none of his friends cared to prophesy.

They were working hard on the evening in question, when Jim, suddenly shutting up his books and pushing back his chair, exclaimed,—

"Old man, you're overdoing it!"

George looked up from his work, surprised at the interruption. Alas! his pale face and sunken eyes testified only too forcibly to his friend's protest. I, who knew him best, and saw him at all times, had watched with grief the steady and persistent undermining of his health, at no times robust, and dreaded to think what might be the result of this protracted strain on his constitution.

"I tell you, you're overdoing it, old man, and you must pull up!"

"Suppose we talk of that afterwards," said George.

"Not at all," retorted the dogged Jim; "just shut up your books, Reader, and listen to me."

"I'll listen to you, Jim, but don't make me shut up my books. What have you got to say?"

"Just this; you're doing too much. I can see it. Everybody can see it. Do you think I can't see your eyes and your cheeks? Do you think I can't hear you blowing like—"

"Really—" began George.

"Listen to me!" went on Jim—"blowing like an old broken-winded horse? Yes, you may laugh, but I mean it. Do you think I don't know you've never been out of doors ten minutes that you could help for six months? and that you have even given up the organ?"

"That's true," groaned George, leaning back in his chair.

"Of course it's true, and it's equally true that you'll smash up altogether if this goes on much longer. Then what will be the use of all your achievements? What will be the good of them to your father and mother, for instance, when you are knocked up?"

"I *must* work up to the Tripos now," pleaded George, "it's only a fortnight."

"My dear fellow, how you talk! As if you weren't certain of a first class even if you were not to look at another book between now and then."

"I'm not at all certain," said George, anxiously.

"Yes you are, and if you hadn't worked yourself into an unhealthy, morbid state you would know it. No, old fellow, we've never quarrelled yet, and don't let us begin."

"Certainly not. Why should we?"

"We shall if I don't get my way. Now tell me, what time did you go to bed last night?"

"Three, I believe."

"No, it wasn't, it was four, for I heard you over head; and the night before it was three; and the night before that, if I mistake not, you didn't go to bed at all. Eh?"

George smiled, but said nothing.

"Well," said Jim, putting down his foot, "this must be stopped. You may work till ten every night, but then you *must* go to bed, or you and I will fall out."

Jim looked so grave as he said this that George was bound to take it in the earnest way in which it was meant. A long argument ensued. George pleaded, Jim bullied, and at last my master was obliged to promise to give over work at twelve every night for the next fortnight. But more he would not promise. No persuasions could tempt him out of doors for more than a hurried five minutes' walk, or induce him to yield to the fascinations of the organ. As the days went on, too, he grew more and more despondent about his own chances, and implored more than once to be released from his promise. But Jim was inflexible, and held him grimly to his engagement.

"You're certain to be among the first three," he said, over and over again, "and if you'll only give yourself two days' rest you may be first."

"Yes, of the third class," mournfully replied my master. "I tell you what, Jim, it isn't fair to bind me down to a promise I made almost under compulsion, and for fear of making you angry."

"It's quite fair, and you would make me angry if you didn't stick to it. Why, my dear fellow, has it ever occurred to you I'm in for the same Tripos as you, and I'm not behaving as ridiculously as you?"

"You are safe to be in the second class," said George.

"I wish I were as safe of a second as you are of a first; but I wouldn't kill myself to be senior classic."

"You forget how important it is for me to take a good place."

"It is far more important to retain your health."

"Think what a difference it would make at home if I got a fellowship."

"What a difference it would make if you had to go to a hospital."

"What a pity, when I have the chance, not to use it."

"What a pity, when you have the chance, to throw it away by knocking yourself up."

"Surely four days can't make any difference."

"Then why not stop work now and take a rest?"

It was plain to see these two would never agree, and so the time went on until the date of the examination arrived.

The night before the two friends met in George's room. George was in low spirits, nervous and fretful. It was plain to see his friend's protest had come too late to be of much use, for he had grown more and more worn every day; and the additional hours spent in bed had only been a source of worry and vexation. Jim, on the other hand, was doing his best to keep up, not his own spirits only, but those of his friend. His chances of a second class were as momentous to him (though he would not admit it) as his friend's of a first, and he too was experiencing, though in a less degree, that heart-sinking which so often characterises the eve of an examination.

"You are not going to work to-night?" said he to my master.

"I think I must," said George, wearily, and putting his hand to his forehead.

"It can't be any earthly good now," said Jim, "so let's forget all about it for a bit and talk of something else."

Forget all about it! George smiled in a melancholy way at the words; but nevertheless he was not well enough to contest the point. "And by the way," added Jim, cheerily, "I've got a letter from Newcome (you remember Newcome, George, the man who played for Sandhurst against us two years ago) I think you'll like to hear."

There was one in the room, whether George liked it or not, who was dying to hear it!

"He's just gone out to India, you know, to join his regiment."

"Here's his letter," he said, producing it and nervously glancing at George to see if he appeared interested. "Shall I read it?"

"Yes, please," said George, slowly.

"It's not a long one. 'Dear Jim,' he says, 'I wish you were out here with all my heart. I should at least have one fellow to talk to among all these strangers. I had a decent enough passage. Father Ocean was on his good behaviour, and the vessel was a snug one. We came in for rough weather in the Persian Gulf, but it didn't afflict me much, and I landed here two days ago, safe and sound. I reported myself to our colonel yesterday and was introduced to my fellow-officers. Some of them are decent fellows, though perhaps hardly in your and my line. I had been told the officers of our regiment were a rackety lot, but I don't see much sign of that yet. It's awfully dull here, and I would give a lot to be up in your rooms at George's, sprawling in your easy-chair and talking over Randlebury days. I suppose you will soon be in for your final. Good luck be with you, my boy! Remember me in your will if you get made a Fellow. I suppose the man I met in your rooms once—Read I believe his name was—will be first. Talking of that day, have you heard lately of Tom Drift? I shall always be glad I went up to town that night and found him out, though I lost him again so soon. I inquired everywhere when I was last in town, but nothing was known of him, except that he was supposed to have been engaged in some—' But that's all about an old schoolfellow and won't interest you. 'We expect to be ordered up-country pretty soon now, and meanwhile have liberty to amuse ourselves pretty much as we like, but, as far as I can see, cards unfortunately seem the only recreation in which the officers indulge. However, I shall be kept busy with drill, and being junior officer expect I shall be for some time fag of the regiment. Mind you write as soon as ever you get this, and a regular yarn. I have had to write this in a hurry, and in a room where a noise is going on. By next mail you shall get a full, true, and particular account of all the doings, sayings, and adventures of yours as ever, C.N.'

"I'm afraid," said Jim, as he folded up the letter, "it will be rather dull out there, for—hullo!"

This ejaculation was caused by seeing that George was sitting motionless with his elbows on the table and his face buried in his hands.

"What's the matter?" he said, getting up and laying his hand on his friend's arm.

George looked up suddenly with a scared face, which frightened Jim.

"Old man, aren't you well?" said the latter anxiously.

"Eh?—oh, yes! I'm all right. Why—why do you ask? But I say, Jim, this room is close. Let's go out and take a turn in the big court."

Jim, in sore perplexity, complied, and for an hour those two paced the flags round the great quadrangle. George was himself again, much to Jim's relief, and suffered himself to be sent uncomplainingly to bed at ten. To bed, but not to sleep. All night long I heard him toss to and fro, vainly endeavouring to recall Greek and Latin lines or some other fragment of his studies. At about six he dozed fitfully for an hour, and then came the knock at the door which summoned him from his bed to the first day of his ordeal.

I would rather not dwell on those examination days, for I could tell, if no one else could, that my master was really ill, and was only prevented by sheer excitement from succumbing at any moment. As day by day passed I could see the effort becoming more and more difficult. The nights were worse than the days—sleepless, feverish, distracted. It was evident this could not go on for long.

The last day of the examination arrived, and my master was in his usual place in the Senate House. His pen flew swiftly all the morning along the paper, and one by one, a triumphant tick was set against the printed questions before him. I could see no one as well employed as he. Jim, at a distant desk, was biting the end of his pen and looking up at the ceiling; other men sat back in their seats and stared with knitted brows at the paper before them; others buried their fingers in their hair and looked the picture of despair. But still my master wrote on. It wanted half an hour to the time of closing when he reached the last question on the paper. I saw his lips curl into a smile as he dashed his pen into the ink and began to write. Then suddenly it dropped from his fingers, and his hands were clasped to his forehead. He made no motion and uttered no cry; men went on with their work on each side of him, and professors at their desks never turned his way. I looked wildly towards Jim; he sat there, biting the end of his pen and scowling at the question before him, but for a long time never looked our way. At last his head turned, and in an instant he was at his friend's side. Others came round too and offered help. Among them my poor master was borne from the hall and carried to his rooms, and that evening it was known all over the University that Reader, of George's, had been taken ill during the Tripos examination, and now lay delirious in his rooms in college.

Every one believed the attack was but a slight one, but I feared the worst; I knew how systematically and fatally my master's constitution had been undermined by the work of the last three years, and felt sure it could never rally from the fierce fever which had laid him low. And it never did. The fever left him in due time, and his mind ceased to wander, but every hour his strength failed him. His parents and Jim, and sometimes his old friend the rector, would constantly be about his bed, and to all of them it soon became evident what little hope there was of his recovery. Indeed, he must have guessed it too!

One day, as Jim sat with him, a faint shout was heard below in the quadrangle.

"What's that?" inquired George.

"I'll see," said Jim, and he went lightly from the room.

Presently he returned with a face almost beaming.

"It's good news," he said; "they were reading the result of the Tripos."

"And where are you?" asked George.

"*You* are first!" said Jim, proudly.

"Where are you?" repeated George.

"I am twelfth."

"In the first class?"

"Yes."

"That is good news, old fellow!"

"That shout was in your honour, you know; our college is as proud as anything to have the first man."

George smiled feebly, and for a long time both were silent.

Then George said,—

"You were right, Jim, after all. If I had listened to you I should have been wiser."

"Never mind, old man, you'll know better another time."

"I shall never have the chance, Jim."

"Don't say that, George; every one hopes you'll get better."

George smiled again, then said,—

"Jim, you will look after my father and mother, won't you? You know I've got a little money now, and they will be comfortably off, but you'll go and see them now and then?"

Jim laid his hand on the wasted hand of his friend.

"And, Jim, I want you to take my watch when I'm gone. I always valued it as much as anything, and I'd like you to have it."

Poor Jim could say nothing, he only gave another pressure of his friend's hand.

Then presently Mrs Reader returned to the room, and he slipped away.

The end was not long in coming. One afternoon as the four friends he loved most stood round his bed, George opened his eyes, and said,—

"Listen!"

"What is it, lad?" whispered the father.

"An organ—somewhere—open the window."

They opened the window, but the only music out there was the chirping of birds in the trees, and the distant footfalls of passers-by.

"Listen, there it is!" he said again.

"What is it playing?" asked the clergyman.

"A new tune."

And almost as he spoke the words, he closed his eyes for the last time on earth.

Chapter Twenty Five.

How I fall into the hands of an old friend.

Boys may imagine with what astonishment Jim Halliday discovered, on receiving the legacy bequeathed him by his dead friend, that I was the very watch which years before he had known so familiarly as the property of Charlie Newcome. At first he could not believe it, and marvelled how any two watches could be so much alike. Then he discovered the "C.N." scratched long ago inside, which he well remembered. And further inquiries enabling him to trace me back to the Muggerbridge silversmith, and from him to the pawnbroker's sale in London, he had no doubt left that I was actually the watch of which nothing had been heard since Tom Drift owned me.

My new master did not long remain in Cambridge after the death of his friend. He left the University in many respects a more thoughtful and earnest man than he had entered it, and in leaving it set himself honestly and faithfully to the work for which he had prepared, and on which his heart was fixed.

I shall not follow him through all the labours of his first village curacy, which lasted a year, during which time many people learned to love the manly, open-hearted young clergyman, and to bless the day when he had been sent among them.

At the end of a year he was removed to the charge of a church in a distant large seaport, where everything was in strangest contrast with the scenes he had just left. Instead of simple villagers and rustics, his work now lay amongst labourers and artisans of the poorest and lowest class. Instead of fresh country air he had now to breathe the vitiated air of close courts and ill-kept streets; and instead of an atmosphere of repose and innocence, he had now to move in an atmosphere of vice and disorder, from which very often his soul turned with a deep disgust. Still he worked manfully at his post with a bold heart, ready to face any hardship in the service of his Master, and never weary of striving by the Spirit's help to bring into the hard lives around him the elevating joys which they alone know who can call Christ the Saviour theirs. One day an adventure befell him which had a strange bearing on my own fortunes, and the fortunes of more than one of my several masters.

The gaol chaplain at Seatown had recently died, and during the interval necessary for appointing a successor Jim was asked and undertook to add to his other labours that of visiting the prisoners confined there. It was melancholy, and on the whole

monotonous work, for the persons whom he thus attended, were mostly stupid, ignorant beings on whose hardened souls it was difficult indeed to make the slightest impression. They listened sulkily to what the chaplain had to say, but to all appearance neither understood nor cared about a single word, and he had the disappointment of noticing, week after week, and month after month, scarcely a sign of good rising out of his labours in the case of any one of them.

One day the governor met him as he was about to pay his customary visits.

"Oh, good-morning, sir. You'll find a new customer to-day."

The gaol governor, you will observe, spoke about his prisoners in a very commercial sort of way.

"Yes, and a queer one too," he added; "he doesn't look like one of our regular customers."

"What is he imprisoned for?"

"He was drunk, and quarrelled with a sailor on the quay, and pushed him into the water, I believe."

"Was the sailor drowned?"

"No, they fished him out, but this gentleman has got six months for it. He seems very down about it, so I'd like you to see him."

"All right; I will make a point of visiting his cell. Good-morning."

And Jim went on his round, thinking very little about the governor's communication.

Presently he came to the gallery in which the new prisoner's cell was, and asked the turnkey to show him the door.

"No use you a-going in there," muttered that functionary.

"Why?" asked Jim.

"He do swear so as I never hear a cove swear afore."

"Ah," said Jim, "and I suppose you've heard a good deal too in your time."

"So you may say, but this here young fellow comes out with it as if he'd skin you alive."

"Well, I must see him. Let me in, please."

When the door was opened the prisoner's back was turned, nor did he alter his position as Jim entered the cell.

There was undoubtedly something unusual about the man. His figure was not that of a labourer or a rough, nor was his attitude one of stolid brutishness, such as the chaplain had grown only too familiar with.

Jim stood a moment irresolute, and then said,—

"May I speak to you, friend?"

The man turned himself, and without raising his eyes from the stone floor, poured out a volley of curses which fully justified the turnkey's description.

Jim started, and uttered a quick exclamation. But it was not at the curses, terrible as they were. No, his amazement was of another kind altogether; for in the face and voice of this unhappy speaker he was forcibly reminded of one he once knew in very different scenes. As the man went on he watched him keenly and earnestly. He heeded not the oaths, or the taunts, or the threats which flowed from his lips; but as word followed word, and gesture gesture, and look look, he became gradually convinced that the resemblance was more than imaginary—that, indeed, this blaspheming convict was one whom he had once known and still remembered.

Walking up to him, and laying his hand on his shoulder, Jim said, quietly,—

"Tom Drift, do you remember me?"

The man started as for an instant he raised his eyes. Then, letting them drop once more, he growled,—

"That's not my name; I don't know you. Let me alone!"

Jim, more convinced than ever, now did the wisest thing he could in leaving the cell without another word.

"Well," said the turnkey, with a half-triumphant grin, as they turned to leave the gallery, "wasn't I right? Didn't he give you half a dozen as pretty bits of language as you ever heard?"

"Do not speak to me about it, please," replied Jim, more tartly than he had been ever known to speak to any one.

He did not return to the gaol for a week; and then the first visit he paid was to the new prisoner's cell.

He entered it anxiously, and not without misgivings. Tom Drift was sitting on his little bench with his head in his hands.

"May I come in?" said Jim, nervously.

Tom neither spoke nor raised his head; and Jim quietly stepped in. It was evident the interview of a week ago had had its effect on Tom Drift. He seemed as he sat there like a man who would fain lose himself if he only knew how. He never once raised his head from his hands or uttered a syllable while Jim sat and talked to him. The latter knew better than to return to the topic which had so startled the prisoner a week ago, and contented himself with mere kindly talk and the reading of a short passage of Scripture. All this Tom suffered without interruption, stirring neither head nor foot all the time.

"Now, good-bye," said Jim, rising; "don't get to think you have no friends."

The man fidgeted impatiently, and next moment Jim was out in the gallery.

"What's that man's name?" he inquired of the turnkey.

"Dykes; and I tell you what, Mr Halliday, he—"

"Open this door, please, my man," interrupted Jim, by way of cutting him short.

During the week which followed Jim was restless and out of spirits. He seemed unable to settle down to anything, and it was evident his heart was ill at ease—why, it was easy to guess. He had found Tom Drift, and there was a chance of rescuing him. But how to do it? How to approach one who was ashamed of his own name, and who repelled with an oath every offer of help?

Long and earnestly did my master think over the matter. He also wrote a long letter to Charlie, telling him all, and promising

to do all that could be done for the poor prodigal. During the days that intervened before his next visit, too, he made as careful and full inquiries about Tom as it was possible to do.

The poor fellow had come to Seatown a month before, and very shortly became a familiar loafer on the quays. No one knew where he came from or why he was in Seatown, unless indeed he expected to be able to conceal himself on some vessel going abroad. Jim found out the lodging-house where he he had lived, but was unable to hear anything there to throw light on what he had been doing, or whence he had come. One man said he had found him once down by the water's edge, looking as though he intended to throw himself in—and the man who gave him drink at the public-house remembered him—and the man whom he had assaulted—but that was all.

Wretched enough was the picture it presented of a hopeless, friendless vagabond, weary of life, yet not daring to die, and finding his only solace in deeper degradation.

Tom was walking to and fro in his cell the next time Jim called. It was almost the first time I had been able to get a view of his face. And oh! how changed it was. Not merely that it looked pale and worn, with bloodshot eyes and hectic cheeks, but there was a scared despairing look there which fairly shocked me. Dissipation, and shame, and want, had all set their mark there. Alas! how soon may the likeness of God be degraded and defaced! He continued to walk to and fro as Jim sat down and began to read, but I could see he more than once darted a quick glance from under his clouded eyebrows at my master. I could tell by the beating of the latter's heart that he had made up his mind not to leave this morning without an effort to speak to Tom of old times, and I trembled for the result of his venture.

It seemed impossible to say a word while Tom continued to walk up and down his cell like a caged beast in his den, and Jim saw that every moment his opportunity was becoming less likely.

"Will you stand still and listen to me a moment?" he said at last.

Tom growled out an oath, and halted in front of him.

"Be quick," said he.

"I'm not going to preach," said Jim, "I want you to look at something."

"I want to look at nothing," muttered Tom, beginning to walk again.

"But you must, you shall look at it!" exclaimed Jim, starting at once to his feet.

Tom stopped short, suddenly, and turned upon him like a hunted animal. But Jim neither faltered nor quailed. He walked resolutely up to the poor fellow, and suddenly drawing me from his pocket, held me out towards him, saying,—

"Look at this, Tom Drift!"

Tom knew me at once, and I never saw a man change as he did that moment. The savage scowl vanished from his face, and a sudden pallor came to his hollow cheeks. A trembling seized him as he held out his hand to take me, and but for Jim's support he would hardly have remained standing. My master led him gently to the bench, and putting me into his hand, said,—

"I'll leave it with you till to-morrow, old fellow; good-bye."

I heard the key turn in the door behind him, and counted his retreating footsteps down the gallery, and then became fully conscious where and in whose charge I was.

And now an old familiar sound rang in my ears once more, "Be good to Tom Drift!" Long, long had I ceased to believe it possible that the chance of obeying my dear first master's request would ever again come to me; but here it was. I lay in the prodigal's trembling hands, and looked up into his troubled face, and heard his deep-drawn sigh, and felt that there was still something left for me to do.

No one disturbed Tom Drift and me that night, Jim had explained enough to the governor to gain permission for me to remain in the poor fellow's company till next day, and I need hardly say I never left his hand. Memories of better days, of noble friends, of broken vows, crowded in upon him as he sat bending over me that night.

Daylight faded, but still he never stirred; the governor made his nightly round, but he never took his eyes off me; and when it was too dark to see me he held me clasped between his hands as tenderly as if I had been a child.

I cannot, and would not if I could, describe all that passed through Tom Drift's soul that night. What struggles, what

remorse, what penitence. Once he murmured Charlie Newcome's name, and once he whispered to himself, in the words of the parable he had so lately heard, "No more worthy, no more worthy!" Save for this he neither spoke nor moved, till an early streak of dawn shot through the grated window and fell upon us.

Then he turned and knelt, with me still clasped in his hands. And so that night, and with it the crisis of Tom Drift's life, was passed.

There was no more difficulty now for Jim Halliday. Tom even gave me up when he heard how I had come into my master's possession.

Then he asked about Charlie, and Jim told him all he knew. And so the weeks went on, and hope once more lit up Tom Drift's face. How could I help rejoicing in the share I had had in this blessed work of restoration?

Alas! how fleeting is this world's satisfaction!

A short time afterwards, only a week or so before the termination of Tom Drift's imprisonment, my master was returning home from the gaol, tired-out after his day's work. His way lay over a place half brickfield, half common, across which a narrow footpath went. We had got half way over when suddenly a dreadful sensation seized me. I was slipping through the bottom of my pocket! Though I had a watered ribbon attached to me my master always carried me loose in his waistcoat pocket, with never a suspicion of the hole that was there. But now that hole seemed suddenly to expand in order to let me through.

Lower and lower I slipped. I tried to scream, I endeavoured to attract my master's attention. But all in vain. He strode unconsciously on, never giving a thought to me or my peril. I held on as long as I could. Then I dropped. If only I could have fallen on his foot, or struck his knee as I descended! But no. I slid quietly down, scarcely grazing his trousers, and just out of the reach of his boot. For a moment I hoped wildly he would see me as I lay at his feet. Alas! he walked heedlessly on, leaving me on my back on the footpath, powerless to cry after him, and not daring to guess what would become of me.

In fact, reader, I was lost.

Chapter Twenty Six.

How I was unexpectedly enlisted in a new service, in company with an Irishman.

The first thing I was conscious of, after partially recovering from the agony, mental and bodily, of my late accident, was a sharp tugging at my handle.

"Watch! I say, watch!" I heard a voice whisper, "what's to be done?" It was the watered ribbon.

"How should I know?" I growled; "if you had done your duty we should never have been here!"

One is always ready to blame somebody for everything that happens amiss.

"Oh, yes, I dare say," it replied; "if you hadn't poked your nose into that hole we should never have been here."

I did not like being thus talked to by a disreputable piece of watered ribbon, and so kept a dignified silence.

"What's to be done?" presently repeated my companion, giving me another rude tug at the collar.

"Hold your tongues, if we've nothing to say," was my curt reply.

"Oh, but I've a lot to say," went on this irrepressible chatterbox; "in the first place—"

"*Will* you be silent?" said I, angrily; "isn't it bad enough to be down here, all through your carelessness?"

"But it's not through my carelessness; it was through the hole in the pocket you got down here."

"If you had half the sense of a—"

"Of a nickel watch, let us say," said the watered ribbon, losing his temper; "and that would be precious little. Well?"

"If you had half the sense of a blade of grass, you would have been able to prevent it."

"But you see I hadn't half the sense of a blade of grass, or a quarter, or an eighth, or a sixteenth. If I had I should have known better than to lend my moral support to a good-for-nothing, tarnished, ill-regulated, mendacious piece of Britannia metal, that chooses to call itself a silver watch. Ha, ha! what do you think of that?"

What I thought of that this impudent ribbon was not destined then to hear; for there came at that moment a sound of approaching footsteps across the field, which made us both hold our breaths. Unless the comer, whoever he was, could get sight of us, he was sure to tread right on the top of us! Luckily the moon was out, and with her aid I made myself as bright as possible. The footsteps belonged to a youth, not, certainly, oppressed by melancholy, to judge by the tune he was whistling, or very infirm, to judge by the pace at which he advanced.

He came nearer and nearer, and in another step would have been upon me when suddenly both he and the whistling halted. He stooped, and, with an exclamation of surprise, picked me up.

"Man alive, an' it's a watch! Hout, boys! there's luck for yez!"

So saying he thrust me and the ribbon into a pocket crowded with all sorts of oddments, and walked on more rapidly than ever.

I was too bewildered at first by my narrow escape and the sudden change in my fortunes to pay much heed to my new quarters; but presently that everlasting ribbon jerked my neck roughly, and called out in a loud whisper,—

"I say, watch, he's an Irishman!"

"Oh!" said I, as briefly as I could.

"Yes, and there's a lucifer here tells me he's no better than he ought to be. What do you think of that?"

"I think you and he ought to understand one another, if that's the case," growled I, unable to resist the temptation of a sarcastic reply.

"Ho, ho! that's pretty good for you, watch. However, there are some folk who are not as good as they ought to be, let alone better."

After a brief pause he began once more.

"He's young; only eighteen, I'm told."

As no answer was necessary here, I vouchsafed none.

"And he's trying to get a job on some ship, there's a nice look-out! What a poor figure *you'd* cut if you went to sea!"

I could not stand this, probably because I knew it was true; so I turned my back, and in self-defence bade good evening to an old pocket-comb which lay near me.

"Whew! good evening! whew!" replied he. He had a curious way, this comb, of giving a sort of half-whistle, half-sigh, between every few words he spoke.

"I suppose you are an older resident here than I am?" I suggested, by way of making myself agreeable.

"No, I'm not, whew! I belong to the other pocket, whew! I don't know why I'm here, whew! but make yourself at home, whew!"

"I hear your master is going to sea," said I.

"Not at all, whew! Who told you that? whew! but I tell you what, whew—"

"What?" I inquired.

At this moment our master stopped still in the middle of the road. I looked out and saw that he was standing face to face with a fine soldierly-looking fellow in uniform, who wore a cockade of ribbons on his shako.

"Good evening, my lad," said the soldier.

"Good evening, cap'n," said the youth.

"Not cap'n just yet," said the other, laughing; "call it sergeant."

"Well, sargint. Good evening to ye, sargint."

"I've been looking for you all day, that I have," said the sergeant.

"What, me!" said my new master, in astonishment.

"Well, I was told to look out for the finest young fellow in the place, and that's about the same thing."

The lad chuckled at this vastly, and then said,—

"And what might ye be wanting me for, gineral, at all at all?"

"Faith, Patrick," said the sergeant, adopting the Irish brogue as if he had been a native, "to give yez a message from the Quane, just."

"The Quane!" shouted the Irishman.

"Sure, no other. She wants your help, my lad."

"And she shall have it, bless her! What can I do at all?"

"Arrah, she wants yez to foight a blackguard or two that's guv' her impidence."

"They have! I'm yer boy for a shindy. Where are they, colonel?"

"Not far off. And, by the way, she sent ye this bran new shillin' with her best respex to ye, Pat; and sez I'm to axe ye what you'll take to drink her health in; so come along, my lad."

Patrick did come along, and of course was duly and willingly enlisted by his new friend, who promised him honour, and glory, and riches enough to make a commander-in-chief's mouth water.

My new master, perhaps, was fond of making himself out a greater simpleton than he really was. At any rate, he appeared to believe every word the recruiting officer told him. And having no friends to say good-bye to, and no luggage to pack up, and no money (unless he pawned me) to spend, he was ready for marching orders immediately. To my surprise, he showed no desire now to dispose of me.

"What 'ud I want to give him up?" he said to himself as he held me in his hand. "Shure he'll be handy to tell the toime by on the faylde of battle." And with this satisfactory assurance he put me back in his pocket, which, greatly to my relief, was not the one which contained that asthmatic pocket-comb.

Patrick had not to leave for his depot till next day, and took a long stroll through the streets of Seatown along with the recruiting officer this evening. He was in high spirits and very

proud of being a soldier, so the sergeant had very little difficulty in keeping him in good humour. Indeed, he stood that officer in good stead once; for encountering a compatriot acquaintance, a likely sort of fellow too, he helped her Majesty's army to a fine recruit.

"Here, Larry, ye blackguard," called he, "here's a gentman axing for yez."

Larry, a hulking sheepish young Irishman, did not look particularly happy at this information, and replied,—

"And what's to prevent him axing?"

"Man dear, and is that the way ye address one of the Quane's foighting men? Spake to him, meejor dear."

The "dear meejor" at this point took up the discourse.

"Faith," he said, "till I saw Patrick here I thought there wasn't a single boy in the place smart enough to wear a red coat, but I see there's two of ye anyhow."

And the sergeant laughed loud and clapped Larry on the back, and told him it was a shame for him to be walking about in boots full of holes, when he might be strutting up and down as fine as any gentleman in the place, to say nothing of regular pay and quarters, and all the chance of glory. And Patrick added his persuasions, and quoted his own example as a great argument. And between them Larry let the shilling drop into his hand, and the three went off to drink her Majesty's health, and then continued their pilgrimage through the streets.

At one street corner there was a rush of people, reading a newly-posted bill. Fancy my astonishment as I read:—"£20 reward! Lost yesterday (February 4th), near Seatown Gaol, an old silver watch, of very little value to any one but the owner. A piece of black ribbon was attached. Any one bringing the above to the Reverend James Halliday, at 2, Quay Street, will receive £20 reward."

How my heart beat as our party halted in front of this announcement. Alas! my new master was not a scholar, and on satisfying himself the object of the people's assembling was not a fight, he took no further interest in the matter, but shouldered his way past with no more thought of me just at that moment than of the North Pole.

That night, as I lay in the dark in my new quarters, I had leisure to think over the strange turn which my fortune had taken. Here I was in a town where three of those whom at some time or other I had called master were living. One was a common prisoner, one a hard-working curate, and one a raw recruit. Of my other masters, one was a London thief, one lay in his grave, and the other, and best loved of all, was far away in scenes and perils which I could not so much as picture to myself. What would become of me? I knew not; but I could not help feeling the best part of my life was spent, for who could be to me again what some of those whom I now remembered had been?

I had arrived thus far in my meditations when I all of a sudden turned faint. I knew what the matter was at once, and what did this lump of an Irishman understand about watch-keys and winding up?

I called faintly to the watered ribbon—

"I'm running down!"

"Down where?" ejaculated he, in well-feigned alarm.

"Wretch!" gasped I, "somebody ought to wind me up."

"Up where?" again asked my unsympathetic tormentor.

"Brute!" was all I could say.

"That's just the way with you clever people," began the ribbon; "as long as you are all right no name's bad enough for poor people like us; but as soon as ever you get into trouble—"

Here with a groan I ran down, and was spared the end of his speech.

I only had a vague, dim idea of what took place for the next few months. I was conscious of long railway journeys, and arriving at a big, dreary-looking sort of prison where there was nothing but soldiers.

All day long the place rang with bugle notes and words of command; and all night my master slept in a great room with a lot of noisy men, of whom I have an impression he was not the most silent. In due time he put a coat over the waistcoat in which I lived, and was mightily proud the first time he walked abroad in his new dress. And so things went on for nearly a year.

But one day it was evident some great excitement had come to vary the monotony of our barrack life. Officers talked in clusters instead of drilling their men, and the men instead of doing their ordinary work crowded into the long shed to talk over the news.

And it soon came out what the news was. The regiment had been ordered to hold itself in readiness for immediate service at the seat of war in India! What excitement there was! What cheers and exultation! What spirits the men were in, and what friends every one became all of a sudden with everybody else! Among the rest my young master's blood rose within him at the thought of fighting. He had grown sick of the dull routine of barrack life, and more than once half repented his easy acceptance of the Queen's shilling, but now he thought of nothing but the wars, and his spirits rose so high that the sergeant on duty had to promise him an arrest before he could be reduced to order.

At night the room where we slept was a perfect Babel. Men talked of nothing but the voyage and the campaign that was to follow, and wished the marching orders had been for to-morrow instead of next week.

Suddenly (and I don't exactly know why) my master remembered my existence, and I heard him call out,—

"Does any of you boys know anything about a watch, at all?"

"Duck Downie does," replied one or two voices.

"Duck Downie, me jewil, will ye step this way just?" called out my master, "and cast your eye on my watch?"

The gentleman rejoicing in the name of Duck Downie was a ferocious-looking little fellow who had, before he decided to devote his energies to the extermination of her Majesty's foes, been a watchmaker's apprentice. He came, forward at the invitation, and cast his eye in the direction indicated. It was evidently the first time he had known that Paddy so much as owned a watch; for he stared hard at me, and then said with a knowing wink,—

"Did he struggle much?"

"Faith and he did a wee bit, Duck, but so did I too, ye see," said Paddy, entering into the joke.

"Let's have a look at him," said Duck, taking me and stripping the coat off my back. "Give us the key."

"The kay!" said Paddy, whose notions of a watch's interior were delightfully vague; "sure there's no kay. Here, Edward I will ye lend Mister Downie a kay!"

The youth addressed as Edward fumbled in his pocket and pulled out the key of his locker, which he handed to my master.

"That's the boy! Here's a kay, Duck darlint, since ye want one."

Duck was rude enough to laugh immoderately at this—so much so, that my master, who was unconscious of a joke, grew quite angry.

"Ef that's all ye can do—gape like an ould money-box—I can do that as well myself; so hand up the watch!"

Duck Downie laughed again at this, and then said,—

"I want the key of the watch, puddin'-head, not this thing!"

"Arrah, it's got no kay, I tell ye. What ud *it* want a kay for?"

Duck laughed again at this.

"Paddy," said he, "next time you borrow a gentleman's watch be sure you ask 'im for the key, do you hear? You want the key to wind the thing up—that's why he don't go."

Paddy, who had sense enough to see that Mr Downie knew more about a watch than he did, held his peace, and took no trouble to refute the imputation on the way in which he had come by me.

Duck Downie having, with some difficulty, borrowed a watch-key, wound me up, greatly to my delight and that of my master. It was delicious to feel the blood tingling through my veins once more, and to have my heart beat again with renewed animation. My master's glee was only equalled by his astonishment. He looked at first as if he suspected Duck Downie of being in league with supernatural powers; but when that eminent mechanic took the trouble to explain to him the value of the operation he had just performed on me, Paddy without a word rushed out, at the risk of all sorts of penalties, into the town, and knew no peace till he had possessed himself of a

"kay," which henceforth became the inseparable companion of me and the watered ribbon.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

How I made a long journey, and reached the happiest moment of my life.

One morning, in the autumn of the same year, a small cluster of men standing on the deck of the troopship "Lizard," as she tumbled lazily forward over the waves, descried in the far horizon before them a dim low line of blue. My master was one of this cluster, and having recovered from the depression which had afflicted both his spirits and his stomach during the early part of the voyage, now celebrated the "discovery of India" with a cry so outlandish, and other manifestations of joy so extravagant (one of which was pitching one of the sergeants' caps overboard) that he was instantly summoned before the officer in command, and ordered to remain below for the next twelve hours. This was, I need hardly say, a disappointment to both of us.

All day long we heard overhead the crowding of footsteps, the clanking of chains, and the banging about of baggage. The men were paraded on deck and one or two servants down where we were were very busy polishing the officers' swords. Altogether it looked as if we were not intended to remain an hour longer in Bombay than was necessary before marching to the front. Indeed, the arrival of a newspaper on board, along with the pilot, created such a ferment among the officers and men that it was evident something unusual had happened since we last heard the news.

When, towards evening, my master was allowed once more to come on deck, we were not long in discovering the cause of all this.

The Indian Mutiny, which had just broken out when we left England, had suddenly assumed enormous and hideous dimensions. The rebels, taking advantage of their first success, seemed to have gone mad with a most cruel madness. Helpless Englishwomen and children had been massacred and outraged; gallant Englishmen, overpowered by numbers, had been put to shameful deaths. One by one our strongholds had been surprised and captured; and, carrying all before them, the

traitors bade fair to leave England not so much as a foothold in India.

This was enough to make the blood of the tamest among us boil with indignation, and, as the dreadful truth, bit by bit, dawned on our gallant fellows, their impatience became almost beyond control. My master was in sad peril of another arrest by reason of his excitement.

"Show me the spalpeens! Show me 'em!" roared he, almost beside himself. "Let me at 'em, Duck, ye blackguard; let me at 'em!"

And so saying he seized Mr Downie, who happened to be standing near him, and nearly shook the bones out of that unoffending hero's body.

"Do ye hear?" roared Paddy, quite out of his senses.

"I hear," said Downie, coolly, proceeding to take off his coat and tuck up his shirt-sleeves as if he were going to wash his hands.

"What's the gossoon about at all?" cried my master, taken aback by this unexpected reply to his question.

"On'y going to smash you!" calmly replied the imperturbable Duck, beginning to spar—"so come on, my lad!"

That Patrick would have joyfully accepted the invitation I have no doubt, had not an accident at that moment befallen him.

A trolly coming up behind, took him off his feet. To recover himself, he took a spring forward, and landed full on the top of the junior ensign of the regiment, a mild youth with a very little voice, and for the next minute the two were rolling, one on the top of the other, over and over, along the wet deck, amid the laughter of everybody.

By the time Paddy had picked himself up, and helped the poor young ensign to his feet, his ardour was sufficiently damped. He apologised with as good grace as he could to his late victim, and made very humble excuses to the sergeant in charge, who, fortunately for him, had witnessed that the affair was an accident.

Duck Downie, however, with his coat off and his sleeves tucked up, still awaited his man as if nothing had happened, and seemed surprised that Paddy was not as eager as before for the

fray. The latter, however, quite sobered by this time, merely cried out in the hearing of everybody,—

"Arrah! Downie, darlint, ye may put on your coat, because I forgive you this onst; but, man dear, don't do it again!" and was thereby considered by everybody to have had the best of the whole adventure.

Under such dignified circumstances did we set foot on Indian soil.

The reader will be surprised that I have never yet remembered that when I last heard of him, Charlie, my first master, was in India. I did remember it often and often—during the voyage and after landing. And yet I quite despised myself for imagining (as I did) that the next white face I saw would surely be his. India is a big place—a dreadfully big place—and the chances of finding any one particular person there are about as great as of discovering a needle in a haystack. He might have left India long ago; he might have fallen in the massacres of the past few months; he might be somewhere right across the continent. And so, though I could not get rid of a vague sort of expectation, during the first few days of my being in India, I always laughed at myself for a simpleton for thinking such a chance possible.

However, we had no time for thinking just then. From the moment we landed in Bombay, and for a week or two afterwards, we were continually on the move. Long forced marches under a broiling sun, it was enough to wear out any ordinary troops. But our men, and the column to which they were now attached, formed no ordinary body of men. They were Englishmen hastening to the rescue, and nothing on earth could stop them. It was strange how slowly the news of those stirring times came to our ears.

One day we heard with a horror that I can never describe of that foul massacre at Cawnpore, where in cold blood gentle English ladies and innocent children had been brutally massacred, and their bodies flung into a well. Then the news came of the achievements of that wonderful army of relief led by Havelock.

Day after day came the news of his march on Lucknow, where our besieged fellow-countrymen lay. Every one knows of that heroic march. Inch by inch, almost, that handful of men fought their way, fighting a battle a day, and never yielding a step.

One day a horseman galloped into our camp in a great state of excitement. As he flung himself from his horse he shouted something, but we only caught the two words, "Havelock," "Lucknow." It was enough. Lucknow was saved! There rose cheer upon cheer at the news, and shout upon shout. Men and officers alike waved their hats and shook hands, Paddy, as usual, let his feelings get the better of him, and nearly broke Larry's spine with the joyful thump he gave it; indeed, it is safe to say our men were almost as proud as if they had themselves achieved the relief.

Presently, however, there spread a rumour that though Lucknow was saved, it was not yet relieved.

Havelock had fought his way in, but until help arrived, he, too, would be a prisoner within its walls; and almost in the same breath came the grand news; our column was the one destined for this glorious work! How our hearts beat! What mattered it now how long the marches were, and how grilling the sun?

"Lucknow" was the cry; and that magic word sustained us in every hardship and peril.

We reached Cawnpore at last, and there joined Sir Colin Campbell's force. The sight of this house of murder was simply maddening to the men. They left the place next morning with a sort of shudder, and set their faces towards Lucknow. It was not till we were well on the march that I had leisure to look about me and notice how our force was increased.

Several now regiments were with us, and the commander-in-chief and his staff and heavy guns and siege trains accompanied the march. With the exception of a few skirmishes, my master had yet to learn what a battle was. We crept on, halting sometimes, and sometimes pushing on, until one jubilant afternoon the distant walls of Lucknow appeared in sight. Then indeed our brave fellows began to breathe again.

To-morrow would bring them to the city walls, and—what was equally after their hearts—face to face with the enemy. We bivouacked here for the night.

Now it happened on this particular night that my master was on sentinel duty for the first time in his life, and mightily proud of his charge. There he stood as stiff as a poker, with his rifle at his side, and I verily believe would have thought nothing of running his bayonet through the body of the commander-in-chief if he had presented himself without the password.

Patrick was not a dreamer; and as he looked across in the direction of Lucknow I don't suppose his meditations were of the loftiest kind. He knew there would be a fight to-morrow, and so he was happy; he knew duty might call him to action even to-night, and so he kept a very sharp look-out at his post; but otherwise his mind was profoundly untroubled. It was not so with me. On the eve of the battle I could not but feel that in a few hours I might be ownerless, and in a dead man's pocket; and, as I looked back upon my strangely eventful life, I sighed, and half hoped, if he were slain, they would in mercy bury me with him, and so end my cares once and for all. Little I knew!

It was scarcely ten o'clock when Paddy was startled by approaching footsteps. They belonged to an officer of our force who was returning at this hour from an outpost. Paddy eyed him suspiciously, and even when he gave the word looked disappointed at not having the privilege of using his bayonet upon him. Just as he was going on his way, the officer turned and said, in a voice which startled me,—

"Is it ten yet, my man?"

Why did the voice startle me? I could not see the speaker's face, but as he spoke I fancied myself back in the Randlebury schoolroom, and my memory saw a bright-eyed boy I had known once whom I could almost have believed to be the speaker of these few words. Strange what fancies take possession of one! Patrick, as he *had* a watch, and had by this time learned the mysterious art of telling the time, was not the man to answer such a question as this at random.

"Hould my gun, cap'n," he said, "till I sthrike a light."

Fancy a sentinel asking an officer to hold his gun! I knew enough of military discipline to make me tremble at the thought of what would become of my unceremonious master.

But the officer, instead of flying into a rage, took the rifle and laughed. That laugh reminded me more than ever of Randlebury.

"You're a pretty fellow," he said. "Is that the manners they teach you at home."

"I axe yer pardon, colonel, but—"

Here the officer laughed again—and oh! how my heart beat as I heard him. "If I stay here much longer I shall get promoted to general, I suppose," said he. "Look sharp and tell me the time."

Patrick, without another word, produced a light. The officer's face was half turned as he did so, and I could not catch his features, but as he turned impatiently towards the sentinel the light fell full upon it, and with a bound of astonishment I recognised in the swarthy, soldierly officer before me, no other than my oldest and dearest master, Charlie Newcome, of Randlebury.

The strange presentiment, then, was true—I had found him after so long a time! But what if he should not see me? What torment to be so near and yet so far! And how was it likely he would take notice of a common private's watch, and if he did, how was it likely at this distance of time he would remember poor me? Jim, I know, had told him of the strange way in which I had come into his hands, and would certainly have also told him about losing me. He must, therefore, long ago have given up all thoughts about me, or if he ever remembered me it would be as one dead.

My master took me out and held me up to the light.

"It'll be about five minutes past ten, your honour, by my watch."

"Thank you. Good—hullo?"

He had seen me! His eyes were suddenly riveted upon me, and he seemed glued to the spot where he stood.

"Did your honour plaze to spake?" asked Paddy, proceeding to put me back into his pocket.

"My old watch!" cried Charlie, springing forward, and catching hold of my master's hand. "Give it to me!"

Paddy's surprise was unbounded. At first he deemed the man mad, then drunk, then gradually it dawned upon him this was not an officer at all, but a highwayman in disguise, seeking to take advantage of his solitude to rob him.

In an instant he sprang back, and, seizing his rifle, levelled the bayonet to within an inch of Charlie's heart.

"Now, ye thievin' blackguard," said he, "move an inch and I'll stick ye like a pig. Arrah! but ye came to the wrong boy when ye thought to play your tricks on me! Stan' still now, or as sure as you're alive you're a dead man;" and he gave Charlie a suggestive touch with the point of his weapon, which showed plainly he had every intention of being as good as his word.

Here was a predicament! and I could do nothing to help.

Charlie, fairly penned in a corner, was at a loss what to say or do. He began in an angry strain,—

"Don't be a fool, sir; do you—"

"Howld yer tongue!" roared Paddy, giving another poke with his bayonet.

Then Charlie attempted to laugh, which enraged the sentry all the more.

"Is it mock me, ye would, as well as rob me, ye foul-mouthed spalpeen, you?" he cried.

"I don't want to rob you," put in Charlie.

"Faith and I'll see ye don't," retorted the Irishman.

"Listen to me an instant," besought Charlie.

"The sorra a word. Ye shall say it all before the gineral the morrow, for there I'll take ye."

For some moments Charlie stood in this awkward fix, not daring to stir, or even to speak, and with every prospect of spending the night with a bayonet point within an inch of his body.

Suddenly, however, a brilliant idea occurred to him. If I really was his old watch, as he fancied, this man had possibly found me where Halliday had lost me.

It was a bare chance every way, but he determined to try it.

"So you are from Seatown!" he suddenly exclaimed.

The rifle literally dropped from the astonished sentry's hand.

"Who told ye that?" he almost shrieked.

"Never mind," said Charlie, following up the advantage, and softly stepping out of his corner. "It's two years since you left, isn't it?"

Patrick was "dumfoundered." This man must be in league, surely, with the powers of darkness!

"*Now* do you know why I want that watch?" said Charlie sternly, at the same time quietly picking up the dropped rifle. The tables were fairly turned now. The wretched Patrick, whose conscience had more than once smitten him about the way in which he had become possessed of me, looked the picture of terror—not at the bayonet, but at the man who held it.

He drew me from his pocket with trembling hands, and holding me out at arm's length, cried,—

"Arrah, arrah! take him, gineral, take him. How was I to know you was the gentleman dropped him there? Who'd have—"

By this time Charlie had seized me and taken me to the light. In an instant he stripped me of my coat, and there, with bounding heart, read his own initials, scratched years ago with his own boyish hand, in the dormitory of Randlebury.

"It *is* it!" he shouted; "my old watch! Who would have thought it possible!"

Then turning to the trembling Paddy, he said, in a voice almost unsteady in its eagerness,—

"My man, what will you sell me this watch for?"

Paddy looked more astonished than ever.

"Sure it's your honour's own."

"It was once, but it's yours now. But I'll give you a ten-pound note for him and a gold watch besides if you'll let me have him back."

Imagine Paddy's astonishment.

"Sure Duck Downie says it's not worth thirty shillings—"

"Who cares for Duck Downie?" shouted Charlie, pulling out his purse. "Here's the money, and if you come to Lieutenant

Newcome's tent when you are off duty you shall have the watch."

And so saying, and not waiting for another word, he darted off, with me still in his hands, leaving Paddy fairly stupefied with amazement, and with only presence of mind enough left to pick up his rifle and make a royal salute to the retreating form of my first and last and dearest master.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

How I saved my master's life, and retired from active service.

I may with truth say, I reached that night the happiest moment in my life.

Indeed, as the young officer walked on, with me held tight in his hand, it would be hard to say which of us two was the happier.

Charlie's soldier life had not turned out as happily as, long ago, he had pictured it to himself. Away from home, and with comparatively few friends, he had felt himself losing somewhat of his freshness and boyish enthusiasm, and settling down rather to habits of a humdrum commonplace official. Books he had very few, and congenial society still less. Quartered as he had been during the first two years in dull country stations, he had grown weary of the routine of everyday life, and longed for the sight of fresh faces, fresh scenes, fresh occupation.

After a while this desire was gratified in his removal to Calcutta. But if he had suffered from dulness and weariness before, he was now in danger of going to another extreme. In his first joy at getting back into lively society he rushed with ardour into all the attractions and gaieties of the capital. Not that Charlie was a fellow ever to make the same mistakes as Tom Drift. He never associated with companions he knew to be bad, or allowed himself to be led into scenes which were in the slightest degree discreditable. But he did enter rather too readily into the frivolities of his new quarters, at the expense of his peace of mind. His popularity was his greatest snare. Everywhere he went he became a favourite. People were eager to get him to join their parties, and he was often enough too good-natured to refuse. And thus Charlie wasted much of his time, and in the

end found himself far more dissatisfied with himself than in the quiet monotony of his up-country duties.

Do not let me do him injustice, reader, in my account of him during those few weeks at Calcutta.

He was gay but not fast, frivolous though not dissipated. His errors were errors of unprofitableness, but never of viciousness. Even in his most frivolous moments he had never been anything but a gentleman and a good fellow. Still, it had been unsatisfactory, and he knew it to be so in his inmost soul.

In the midst of this life came the mutiny, and, like hundreds of others, Charlie leapt at the call of duty, and flung to the winds all those attractions which had held him captive during the weeks of his idleness. Like hundreds of others his blood boiled at the tragedies of that awful time, and now, of all the rescuing host, there was not one who loved his own life less, or his country's glory more, than Charlie Newcome.

And thus it was with him when I found him.

But to-night, whatever may have been the memories, and hopes, and regrets which secretly animated his breast in finding himself again possessed of his boyish treasure and the companion of so many of his happiest days, Charlie Newcome had no leisure to sit down and spend his time in passive contemplation. He had a report to make to his colonel, and an important despatch to carry to the commander-in-chief. Then there was the ammunition to be served out among his men, and he had to superintend the process. And there were the plans for next day's assault to be talked over with his brother officers, and the various detachments for that duty to be selected. So that Charlie was a busy man that night. But with what a light heart he laboured! Among his occupations he did not forget the gold watch, but had the satisfaction of making Paddy the happiest man (but one) in the camp.

Thus, first with one thing, then another, the night wore on; and, when towards morning he lay down on his camp bed for a hurried rest, he fell asleep like a child, whistling one of the old Randlebury songs, and with me, as of old, under his pillow.

At the first note of the bugle he sprang from his couch, and putting me in my old abode, next his heart, sallied out to see the preparations for the advance. It was generally known we were to make a dash for the approaches to Lucknow this day; and at the prospect of the attack the troops hailed the signal to

get under arms with enthusiasm. It was plain to see, by the alacrity with which the men worked, that my master was a prime favourite in his own company; indeed, such was their promptitude that we stood ready and waiting long before the order to march arrived.

During this interval, if Charlie was seized with a desire to know the time once, he was seized twenty times; and each time a mere glance was not enough to satisfy him. How natural it all seemed, and how like old times!

Then came the longed-for signal, and with a cheer the men set their faces towards Lucknow.

Now, the reader must not expect I am going to describe military operations for his edification. I know nothing about columns and countermarches, and echelons and skirmishing; how could a watch, hid under a scarlet jacket, be expected to do so?

True, I had eyes that could penetrate any number of scarlet jackets, but what good was that when I knew about as much of the art of war as I did of candle-making!

But there are some things in the events of that memorable day which I shall remember as long as I live.

After about an hour's march we were suddenly halted, and almost at the same moment there came the sullen boom of a gun ahead. I could feel Charlie's heart leap at the sound. It was the enemy at last; and now the fate of Lucknow was to be decided.

A horseman dashed up to the head of our column and called out to our colonel, in a voice loud enough for us all to hear, "Bring up your battalion." Next moment we were advancing in double quick time through a lane of troops to the front. There two other regiments stood waiting, and almost the instant we arrived the whole body moved forward at a run.

It was an exciting moment. The enemy's guns sounded louder and more frequent ahead, and dropping shot at either side announced that our danger was not all in front. The pace was kept up for a hundred yards or so, until we reached a cluster of trees, in whose shelter the column was halted to get breath. The fire in front still kept up, and through the smoke I thought I could discern the dim outline of a low building, not five hundred yards distant. At this moment Charlie and the other officers

were summoned to the front for orders. They were brief and to the point.

"Straight for the fort, there!" said the commanding officer, "the shortest way you can take your men!"

It was an order that meant certain death to scores of those brave fellows; yet when they had heard it they cheered as schoolboys cheer for a holiday.

Again we stood waiting. The officers with their swords drawn stepped in front. The men quickly loaded and fixed bayonets, and then came the shout,—

"Forward!"

As we cleared the trees we burst full in the face of the enemy's fire. For a moment the balls whizzed harmlessly over our heads, then there was a crash on the ground before us, and, as we rushed on, the men parted on either side to avoid stepping over a dying man. It was awful; and every step we took grew more and more fatal. Under that withering fire men went down by the dozen; yet still the column rushed on. The front rank broke into gaps, which the rear rank men dashed forward to fill, till they themselves fell. And still on we rushed. Officers, too, everywhere to the front, dropped one by one; but still we never checked our pace. The sullen walls of the fort stood clear before us and poured upon us an unceasing shower of bullet and ball. In a minute our foremost men would be at the walls.

"Forward now! follow me!" I heard Charlie cry; and looking round noticed for the first time that the captain of his company was missing. The men cheered by way of answer, and their run broke into a rush as they followed him under the guns. Others were at the fort before us, and the storm had already begun. Heedless of wounds, heedless of peril, the men swept towards the breach, and called on those behind to come on. Charlie was one of the earliest of our battalion there, and already his feet were in the place, and he was waving to his men to come up when—

I felt a dull crushing sensation. My nerves collapsed; my senses left me. Speech, sight, hearing, all failed me in an instant; a strange darkness came over me, and then I was conscious of nothing.

When my senses slowly and wearily recovered I was still lying in my master's pocket in the place where he had fallen at the storming of the breach. Firing was still going on all around, but the shouts of our men rose now from inside the fort instead of outside. And what shouting it was! The enemy's guns ceased as if by magic, and the distant sounds of firing showed plainly enough that the main body, now that we had silenced the fort, was resuming its march on Lucknow.

All this flashed through me as my senses gradually returned, and before even I had time to contemplate my own condition. What a wreck I was! A helpless cripple past all healing, of no use to any one, and utterly incapable of resuming the ordinary duties of life. But almost before I could realise this, another care flashed through my mind and drove out every other.

My master! What of him? There he lay, motionless and pale, with his blue eyes closed, and a little stream of blood trickling down his chest. Could he be dead?

Anxiously I listened if his heart still beat. At first all seemed silent as death. Then there seemed a slight quiver, and as I listened still, a faint throb. He lived still! How I longed for help to come!

And before long it came. Two soldiers of Charlie's regiment came out of the fort and walked straight towards us.

"It was close to the breach he dropped," said one.

"Come on, then," said the other, "and we may be in time."

They were not long in finding the object of their search, and leant eagerly over him.

"He's dead, poor fellow!" said the first; "shot right through the heart!"

"So he is," said the other. "It must have—wait a bit!" cried he, in sudden excitement. "Feel here, Tom, quick! he's alive yet! Oh, if we could only get hold of a doctor!"

"Is there one about at all?"

"Not that I know of, unless the Major knows what to do."

Just then there came up a gaunt man, in an undress uniform, who, seeing that they knelt over a wounded man, said,—

"Is he alive?"

"It's all he is, sir," replied one of the men; "and we're wondering how to get a doctor to him."

"Let me see," said the stranger, approaching the body.

He knelt beside it and gently removed the coat from the wound.

"It looks as if he must be shot through the heart. Stay a bit, though, here's a watch!" and he pulled me softly out of the pocket. As he did so I looked up at him. Surely I knew his face! Surely somewhere I had seen that troubled frightened face before! Then I remembered Seatown Gaol! Could this be Tom Drift here in India, and kneeling beside his old schoolfellow's body?

It was indeed Tom Drift! But he neither recognised me nor the wounded man before him; indeed he was too busy examining the latter's wound to look very closely at his face. As he removed the waistcoat he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"A most wonderful thing," he said; "the bullet, which must have been a spent one, has struck his watch and turned aside. A most wonderful escape!"

And then he produced a box of instruments, with one of which he probed the wound, and after some trouble extracted the bullet. Then, bandaging up the place, he said,—

"He may do now, but he has lost a lot of blood. Let him lie here a bit, and presently, if he seems better, move him into the fort. I will see him again this evening."

And so saying, he passed on to the next prostrate figure.

Towards evening the two men tenderly lifted their officer in their arms and carried him inside the fort, where a rude hospital had been fitted up. Here Charlie, who, after the extraction of the bullet and staunching of blood, had shown symptoms of recovery, opened his eyes, and found himself able to say a few words to those round him. And when they told him how I had probably saved his life his face lit up with a most triumphant smile, and he asked that I might be put into his hand.

As he lay there, scarcely strong enough to speak, and fondling me in his fingers, the doctor entered the hospital.

He came straight to Charlie's bed. My master's eyes were closed when Tom first reached his side; and I could see by the face of the latter that he was still as far from recognising his old schoolfellow as ever. But directly Tom softly lifted the clothes in order to examine his wound, the patient woke and opened his eyes. They rested for a moment on the doctor's face, and then, with a sudden flush and start, he half raised himself in his bed, and exclaimed,—

"Tom Drift, is it you?"

The doctor thus unexpectedly hearing his own name pronounced, turned pale, and started back as if he had been shot. The scared, terrified look returned to his face, and for an instant he seemed as if he would rush from the place. But only for an instant.

As he looked again on the face of his patient a strange expression came over his own. Wonder, doubt, joy, succeeded each other in rapid succession, and then all of a sudden it flashed upon him who this was.

"Charlie!" he exclaimed, trembling with astonishment; and next moment the poor prodigal was on his knees beside his friend's bed, sobbing, with his head buried in his hands.

Don't laugh at him, reader, for thus forgetting himself. Tom Drift had been through many trials you know nothing about, and out of those trials he had come broken in spirit and as humble as a child. *You* might have had more regard for appearances, perhaps, and controlled your emotion genteelly; but, as I have said before, Tom Drift was not anything like so strong-minded as you. So he knelt there and sobbed; and Charlie, as he lay, took his hand into his own, and held it.

Presently he said, softly, "Tom!"

Tom looked up and rose to his feet.

"What, old fellow?"

"Look here, Tom!" said Charlie, showing me.

At the sight of me, bruised and battered as I was, Tom's feelings overcame him again. He seized me eagerly, and looked long and tenderly into my face; then his tears came again, and once more he sunk on his knees at Charlie's side and buried his face in his hands.

The place was getting dark. The noise of voices outside and the distant roar of guns slowly died away; the guards for the night were called out, and one by one soldier and invalid fell asleep after their hard day's toil. But Tom Drift never moved from Charlie's bedside, nor did Charlie, by word or movement, disturb him. In the silence of that night I seemed to be back in the past—when, years ago, I first knew these two. The dreary hospital changed, in my imagination, into the old Randlebury dormitory.

These beds all round were occupied not by wounded soldiers, but by soundly-sleeping boys, worn out with sports or study. And the two between whom I lay were no longer suffering men, but the light-hearted lads of long ago. I could almost fancy myself ticking through the silent watches; and when now and then the fingers that held me closed over me, or fondled me tenderly, I could almost have believed I heard the low sweet whistling of an innocent boy as he furtively turned in his waking moments to his father's precious gift.

It all seemed so strangely natural that as I woke from my dream it required an effort to remember where I really was. All was silent around me. I peered first at my master, then at Tom Drift; they were both asleep—sleeping, perhaps, as simply as ever they did in those bygone days—Tom kneeling still by the bedside with his head upon his arms, and Charlie turned towards him with one hand upon his friend's, and I—I lay between them.

Thus the sultry Indian night passed, and then at the little window opposite there came a faint gleam of light.

Charlie woke first, and, laying his hand gently on Tom's arm, said, "Tom Drift, old fellow!"

With a start and a bound Tom was awake and on his feet, staring in a bewildered way round him.

At last his eyes fell on Charlie, and he remembered where he was. "I was asleep and dreaming," he said.

"So was I," said Charlie—and *I* could almost guess what their dreams had been.

"Now, Tom," said Charlie, "you must look to my wound."

"My poor boy!" exclaimed Tom; "to think I have forgotten it all this time!"

"It's not worth bothering about, after all," said my master, "But see, Tom, the day is breaking."

"Ay!" said Tom, looking down with a new light in his weary eyes, "the day *is* breaking!"

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Which brings my adventures to a close.

Reader, be my companion in one scene more, and my story is done.

A month or two ago there was a grand merrymaking at the house of one Charles Newcome, Esquire, late captain in her Majesty's army, to celebrate the tenth birthday of his son, Master Thomas James Newcome. The company was mostly juvenile, and included, of course, the gallant captain's two little girls and his younger son, that most terrible of all Turks, Charlie the younger. Then there were all the little boys and girls living in the square, and many others from a distance, and one or two big boys and girls, and one or two young gentlemen who stroked their chins as if something was to be felt there, and one or two young ladies who would not take twice of sponge-cake, for fear of looking as if they were hungry. But besides these there were a few grown-up people present, whom I must not forget to name. Naturally the gallant captain was one, and the gallant captain's lady was another; and then there were the last-named lady's two brothers there, one a clergyman called the Reverend James Halliday, and the other (and elder) Mr Joseph Halliday, a civil engineer with a ferocious pair of whiskers. And, to complete the party, there was present a grave, anxious-looking gentleman by the name of Mr Drift, a surgeon.

These all sat apart and looked on while the young folk enjoyed themselves. And how the young folk did enjoy themselves that night! What shouting and laughter there was, what a jingling of the piano, what hiding in corners, what romping on the stair case! And the round games, and the charades, and the family posts! Oh dear me, I'm an old watch, and I've gone through a good many noisy scenes, but I never remember such a racket as this.

And how the young folk besieged the elder and compelled them to join in the fun. There was papa down on his hands and knees with half-a-dozen youngsters on his back. And there was Uncle Joseph performing tricks of conjuring before a select audience; and Mr Drift telling stories to another; and as for the reverend Uncle Jim, he was made blind man, and had his long coat-tails pulled; and, strange to say, he never caught anybody all the time. And then the supper! who shall describe that? the clattering of dishes, the rattle of knives and forks, the banging of crackers, the peals of laughter, and the cross-fire of chaff.

Alas! all good things must come to an end, and so did this party. One by one the little guests said good-bye, and after they had gone the little family of children and elders was left alone. Though it was past eleven, the little urchin Charlie insisted on clambering on to Mr Drift's knee, to hear one last story, and the little girls besieged their uncles, and put their arms round their necks, and besought their intercession with mamma to gain them another half-hour's respite down stairs.

"Charlie," said Tom Drift, "this little fellow is worrying me for a story. Suppose you tell one."

"Oh yes," shouted that small chorus. "Oh yes! papa, please tell us a story?"

"Hear, hear!" said Uncle Joe.

"Fire away," said Uncle Jim.

"Remember, it must be quite a short one, Charles," said mamma.

Charlie Newcome the elder looked puzzled for a minute, and fidgeted uncomfortably in his seat.

Then he turned to his eldest boy, and said,—

"Tom, open that cabinet there and bring me the watch that is under the glass-case."

"The old, ugly watch, papa?" asked the boy, running off on his errand.

"Yes, the old, ugly watch," said papa, with a queer sort of smile.

The boy brought me. I was taken out of my case, and lay there in his open hand.

"Once upon a time," began papa—and what a hush fell on that little company!—"once upon a time there was a little boy,"—why was it everyone but the children looked so grave? and why did Mr Drift push his chair back into the shadow? why, even, did papa's voice tremble now and then as he went on, and caught the eye first of one and then another of his listeners?

That night he told my story—not as I have told it to you. There was not much about Mr Drift in the story he told, and a great deal less about himself than there might have been. But as he went on these children crowded round me and looked with awe upon my battered body, and read with reverence those quaintly-scratched initials, and as they followed me in imagination from one master to another, and from one peril to the next, ending up with the famous battle before Lucknow, they forgot I was old and ugly, and I gradually appeared to their little eyes one of the greatest treasures which their father's house contained.

"And here he lies in my hand, children," concluded papa; "and if you love him as much as I do you must be very fond of him. And now, good-night, all of you."

The End.